The Opera is Booming. This is a City.
Opera in the Urban Frontier of Denver, 1864–1893

by

Austin Jonathan Jerome Stewart

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Mark Clague, Chair
Associate Professor Naomi André
Associate Professor Gabriela Cruz
Professor Philip J. Deloria, Harvard University
Professor Emerita Katherine K. Preston, College of William & Mary
Professor Steven M. Whiting

Touring opera companies brought illusion into mundane reality. They were exotic and all the more magical for that. But like all magic shows, performance was shadowed by an awareness of its own ephemeral nature. Opera touring companies were saturated in the pathos of our mortality. They were transient as life is transient, life which is a kind of tour, a journey from one place to another.

—John Dizikes (1932–2018), *Opera in America*

Austin Jonathan Jerome Stewart

ajstewar@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-2841-9909

DEDICATION

For Charlie and my family,

In memory of my grandmothers, my first teachers and audiences,

and

Dr. David DiChiera (1935–2018), friend and mentor.

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Many wonderful experiences have brought me to this work. During the summers as a kid, my second home was the Ramsdell Theater in western Michigan, built in 1902 by a lumber baron and local philanthropic booster. Then there were five summers when I worked and studied in the Wheeler Opera House in Aspen, singing, building sets, and translating operas for audiences onto supertitles. And on the road through the Continental Divide those summers, I would stop in Leadville to enjoy a cup of coffee and a private tour of Tabor's Opera House, welcomed by Baby Doe Tabor's one-time neighbor, Evelyn Furman—a remarkable person, teacher, and steadfast preservationist who singlehandedly kept the doors of that theater open for fifty-five years. I suppose the questions my younger self had—"Why on earth is there an opera house in a town of 2,500 people at tree-line altitude?" and "What opera was actually performed there?"—have remained with me ever since those first rest stops in Leadville.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	
CHCS	*Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, edited by Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, and Thomas J. Noel. 5th ed. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2013.
DDC	*Daily Dramatic Chronicle* (San Francisco, CA: 1865–1868).
DDT	*Denver Tribune* (Denver, CO: 1871–1884).
RMN	*Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, CO: 1859–2009).
RMNW	*Rocky Mountain News Weekly* (Denver, CO: 1859–1879).

ABSTRACT

In 1888, a *Harper's Weekly* correspondent praised Denver, Colorado, as "a metropolis, a center of refinement, a place rich in itself, influential, and the admiration of all beholders." Three decades earlier, Denver had been little more than an outpost at the edge of the frontier; now, Denver represented civic respectability and the achievements of Manifest Destiny. This dissertation examines the presence of opera during the emergence of Denver as an economic and political center in the American West, and how opera was experienced between 1864 and 1893 in spaces from makeshift theaters above saloons to the Tabor Grand Opera House. The first date marks the earliest known performance of opera in Denver; the latter, the onset of the city's economic depression following the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. Whether performed by itinerant professionals or local amateurs, opera played an active role in the process of urbanizing the frontier and sustaining Denver's civic identity. Opera, as *the* cultural institution of the nineteenth century, evidenced the presence of colonialists in the American West, was used by civic boosters to direct a fledgling city in political and social matters, and provided opportunities for both dominant and minority groups to construct place and community.

This dissertation examines the relationship between opera and place-making, identity, civic boosterism, the transference of vernacular opera, and participatory music-making. Discourses about the moralizing influence of theater and "civilizing" the frontier emerge, which reframe new Western historiography on "high" culture, and resituate the operatic culture of Western settlers in the United States within a transnational experience. This process was aided by itinerant opera singers, including Anna Stein and Renzo Gruenwald, Emma and Clelia

Howson, Marie Aimée, and Alice Oates, who introduced Denver to the works of Jacques Offenbach and other popular opera composers. Institutions such as the Tabor Grand Opera House, inaugurated by the "people's prima donna" Emma Abbott in 1881, reflected the stability of the city's economy and growing population, as well as its perceived affluence. This theater entwined Denver in a nation-wide craze for English-language opera, while foreign-language companies as auspicious as Henry Mapleson's Her Majesty's Opera Company, starring Adelina Patti and Etelka Gerster, alienated audiences by inflating their ticket prices. Nevertheless, the successes of the English-language opera troupes inspired local amateur musicians to involve themselves in creating opera. Members of the Colorado Opera Club crafted their collective identity in Stanley Wood's Rocky Mountain-themed operetta *Brittle Silver* (1882). A homespun piece that contributed significantly to place-making for Denver's amateur musicians, *Brittle Silver* inspired sentimental attachment to the American West, and thematized silver mining labor disputes, interactions between sourdoughs and tourists, and relations with the indigenous nations. Finally, this dissertation brings to light the same phenomenon of amateur operatic activity in Denver's African American community. This includes an examination of the Hyers Sisters and their tour of Colorado, as well as Harry Lawrence Freeman's *The Martyr* (1893) and its performance by his amateur company, engaging representations of emancipation, religiosity, and liberty in the American West. On balance, this dissertation redresses several gaps in Western urban history by considering culture, class, civic and racial identity, and boosterism through the ambitious, often irrational lens of opera production.

INTRODUCTION

Situating Opera in the Urban Frontier

On September 8, 1881, the "local" column of the *Denver Tribune* opened its report on the city's latest operatic activities with the headline: "The Opera House continues to boom. This is a City."[1] Soprano Emma Abbott and her company had inaugurated the new Tabor Grand Opera House three days earlier with William Vincent Wallace's *Maritana*, and already news of the fever pitch for opera in Denver was spreading far and wide. A report in the *Chicago Tribune* stated that Denver newspapers were so effusive in their praise they had "'slopped over' in their attempts to do justice to this palatial establishment." By way of the newspaper exchange, the *Detroit Free Press* shared that T. J. Forhan, "mayor" of a mining camp on the Western Slope, enjoyed hearing Emma Abbott in Denver as it had been "four years since he heard a softer tune than the aesthetic creek of a rusty windlass or the discontented plaint of the toilsome mule." And a *Washington Post* editor, after apprising his readers of the cost to build the Tabor Grand Opera House and its lavish furnishings, sharply remarked that "it is something like we ought to have in Washington. But the drama is better supported on the edge of the Ute reservation than it is at the National Capital."[2] Denver was a city, and the boom of its first operatic season at the Tabor Grand Opera House helped mark this fact. The presence of opera and an opulent theatre

[1] *Denver Tribune*, 8 September 1881, 4.

[2] *Chicago Tribune*, 11 September 1881, 18; *Detroit Free Press*, 11 September 1881, 10. Dr. T. J. Forhan was mayor of Ruby Creek, now a mining ghost town in Gunnison County, Colorado.; *Washington Post*, 19 September 1881, 2.

exemplified Denver's economic development, the proliferation of cultural amenities, the pernicious presence of settler colonialism, and the urban frontier.

But neither this interest in opera nor the enterprise undertaken to support it came about overnight. Twenty-three years earlier Denver was little more than a frontier outpost at the edge of the expanding American empire, founded by men who ventured into the heart of the Kansas Territory to find relief from the hardships brought on by the financial Panic of 1857, and strike their fortune. By the early 1890s, Denver was a center of commerce, industry, trade, and culture.

What role did opera play in forming the metropolitan identity of Denver, and then in representing that identity outwardly? To answer this question, this dissertation interrogates the performance and reception of opera in Denver during its urbanization in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Bookending this study is the arrival of opera there in 1864 and the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act in 1893, which decimated Denver's silver-centered economy. Furthermore, the cultivation of opera, performers, theatres, and audiences in Denver makes for a compelling study of place and community in the West, as well as manifestations of settler colonialism and multiculturalism.[3] Answering the question of opera's contribution to Denver's identity also contributes to the sociology of the urban frontier, the history of Western boosterism and civic development, American musical culture, and studies of amateur music-making.

In some cases, the presence of opera reveals more about intentions than realities, as when real barbarism against indigenous peoples superseded the alleged progress of civilization. In others, the patronage and performance of opera was fundamentally uplifting for Anglo-, Euro-

[3] In this dissertation, I will use "America" or the "American empire" as a short form of the official name of the United States of America and its territories. I acknowledge the misnomer and the multiplicity of nations and peoples represented and discussed in this dissertation. Furthermore, I acknowledge that the city of Denver occupies land that was the territory of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Ute peoples. May their own cultures not pass from memory and practice, and may this dissertation complicate our awareness of the ways in which settler colonialism worked against indigenous nations, even in the presentation and reception of art.

American, and African American communities, populations that employed opera to express their identities, political concerns, sense of place, and social status. Indeed, as this dissertation argues, many of its citizens used opera to help shape public dialogue as Denver grew from a small mining camp to one of the great commercial and economic centers of the American West. By ascribing significance to the performance and reception of opera and its "civilizing influence," Denverites engaged representations of physical and economic power, and a collective self.

Urbanizing the Frontier

Past and present national memory favors an image of the American Old West as a wilderness made hospitable by conquest and the toil of pioneers. It is also represented as the "meeting point between savagery and civilization"—a narrative that is distilled and sanitized whenever children play "Cowboys and Indians."[4] For Anglo- and Euro-Americans, the actualities of Western history often remain locked behind the idyll of the West as a democratic utopia. This image was engrained in Western history by Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1893 address at the World's Columbian Exposition: "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development."[5] By settling the frontier, Turner argued, white settlers had civilized a savage wilderness, embedding in it democracy, individualism, and exceptionalism. Turner's thesis, which exemplifies the Manifest Destiny doctrine, holds that the frontier was a process. But this paean suffered from its own proximity to the events it celebrated, bowing under the weight of its

[4] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," chap. 1 in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920; repr., New York: Dover, 1996), 3.

[5] Ibid. The U.S. Census Bureau pronounced the frontier "closed" in 1890 when the population density in the West rose to greater than two persons per square mile, meaning there was no longer a discernible frontier line. On the historiography of the 1890 census and the genesis of Turner's thesis, see Gerald D. Nash, "The Census of 1890 and the Closing of the Frontier," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (July 1980): 98-100.

indifference toward the effects of urbanization and subordination. Instead, when we conceive of the American West as a place (or network of places) rather than a process, the frontier becomes a meeting ground of nature and humans, prosperity and recession, and competing ideologies.[6] Doing so also introduces stories and voices which the myth of the frontier otherwise marginalizes or represses, even as they concern something as erudite as opera.

As a challenge to Turner's thesis, Richard Wade first explored the "urban frontier" conceptually in the 1950s, arguing that the settlement of the American West was born out of commercial capitalism and not agrarian adaptation. Wade defined the urban frontier as a network of Western cities organized to develop hinterlands through trade and investment. Urbanism, imperial expansion, and colonial economic development were the principal driving forces behind the conquest of the frontier. He described these towns as the "commercial nerve centers of the frontier," and Denver was a market town for a vast portion of the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains regions.[7] In this analysis, the historiography of the American West is reoriented with cities as central and centralizing points: Western cities preceded the farms Turner praised, and society and culture followed the development of civic centers such as Denver, Omaha, Salt Lake City, and St. Louis as they sought to imitate—and later, compete with—eastern cities.

Urbanism promoted the United States' rapid conquest of the frontier, and Denver grew during the period examined here as a gateway for trade, commerce, politics, and identities.[8]

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[6] Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Closing the Frontier and Opening Western History," chap. 1 in *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (1987; repr., New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).

[7] See Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790–1830* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 1–3, 41–42; as well as the application of this concept to a close reading of the relationship between urbanism and colonialism offered in Eugene P. Moehring, *Urbanism and Empire in the Far West, 1840–1890* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004).

[8] As Carl Abbott has argued concerning the growth of western cities as central and centralizing points, "urban settlements did "win the West" in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries as spearheads, anchors, and organizers of conquest and settlement carried out in many European languages . . . they were jumping-off points for exploration and military occupation, entry points for migration, and go-between in continental commerce." See Carl

Organized in 1858 as a frontier outpost by land speculators from Georgia, young Denver was mostly destroyed by fire in 1863. The flooding of Cherry Creek the following year swept away much of what had been salvaged from the fire. Thereafter, Denver continued to develop with renewed vigor along a trajectory seen in other emerging metropolises: the discovery of gold and silver brought miners and prospectors seeking their fortune, and what was a transient camp became a metropolitan center. Denver began, as city historians Lyle Dorsett and Michael McCarthy have put it, as a "turnstile town," its residents and fortunes changing yearly; with very few exceptions, the ethos was "every man for himself."[9] While many prospectors were disillusioned and headed back East, those sourdoughs (an experienced prospector in the American West, or "old-timer") who were successful remained, attracting entrepreneurs and capital to build the necessary institutions for economic growth: railyards, smelters, warehouses, factories, utilities, banks, saloons, and even theatres.

Denver quickly became the region's economic center, connected to eastern markets by two railroads, and thus ripe for prodigious growth and development.[10] Its population soared between 1870 and 1880 from 4,759 to 35,629, totaling 106,713 inhabitants by 1890. In that year, there were more than thirty millionaires in the city, and almost $224 million in gold and $541 million in silver had been mined in Colorado by 1900.[11] Capital, people, and goods—including

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Abbott, *How Cities Won the West: Four Centuries of Urban Change in Western North America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), 11.

[9] Lyle W. Dorsett and Michael McCarthy, *The Queen City: A History of Denver*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing, 1986), 3–9.

[10] On Denverites' ambition to create an imperial center for railroad building and a capital for processing raw materials, see Abbott, *How Cities Won the West*, 78–84. The main railroads were the Kansas Pacific and the Union Pacific, which was connected by the local Denver Pacific in 1870 when John Evans outhustled Golden and Central City to make Denver the connecting point. On the development of Western economies, see William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), xviii-xix; 31–45.

[11] Denver Auditor's Office, *Report of the Auditor of the City and County of Denver* (Denver: The W. F. Robinson Printing, 1916), 16–19. Approximately translated into US$2017, a millionaire would be worth at least $27 million,

entertainment—were funneled through Denver. The result was "a new social reality," as geographer William Wyckoff notes in his survey of the city's nascent urbanism, in which Denver moved from a "simplified pioneer society toward an ever more culturally complex urban geography."[12] Furthermore, if the predictions of New York journalist Julian Ralph came true, Denver would soon be the commercial and physical center of the continental United States: "the people have adopted what they call their 'thousand-mile theory,' which is that Chicago is 1000 miles from New York, and Denver is 1000 miles from Chicago, and San Francisco is 1000 miles from Denver, so that, as anyone can see, if great cities are put at that distance apart, as it seems, then these are to be the four great ones of America."[13]

As the population grew and the financial prosperity of Denver's citizens improved, so did the quality of life and opportunities for leisure, and the city prided itself on the presence of many newspapers, social societies, parks, schools, theatres, and entertainments. *Harper's Monthly* columnist Edward Roberts praised Denver in 1888 as "a metropolis, a center of refinement, a place rich in itself, influential, and the admiration of all beholders."[14] New sources of capital, networks, and institutions were invented and, when necessary, imported in the interest of articulating the power and affluence of the young city.

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the value of Colorado gold mined equivalent to $6.2 billion, and the value of Colorado silver mined equivalent to $15 billion.

[12] William Wyckoff discusses Denver's economic growth, landscape intensification, social geography, and complex cultural landscape in *Creating Colorado: The Making of a Western American Landscape, 1860–1940* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 108–124.

[13] Julian Ralph, *Our Great West: A Study of the Present Conditions and Future Possibilities of the New Commonwealths and Capitals of the United States* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1893), 315; quoted in Abbott, *How Cities Won the West*, 84.

[14] Edwards Roberts, "The City of Denver," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 76, no. 456 (1888): 944–957, this specific quotation appearing on 944.

Denver's culture and social structures were those of migrants seeking their fortune and a new life in the American West. Gunther Barth later identified Denver as an "instant city" along with Omaha, Salt Lake City, and St. Louis—settlements that grew exponentially over a single generation into a metropolis, with its institutions and traditions imported wholesale by waves of settlers. Most inhabitants before 1890 were not Denverites by birth. Therefore, their cultural traditions were linked to migrant experiences, and influenced largely by the prominence in the community of foreign-born Germans, who possessed an affinity for participatory music-making and the sociability of theatre.[15] On account of this German influence, opera was present in the cultural fragments they brought with them. "People rearranged cultural fragments to give meaning to their existence in the face of teeming cities," writes Barth of the emerging urban frontier, "their culture was more a state of mind than a set of distinct attainments."[16]

Yet Barth's assessment glosses the deliberate contributions of community builders, those who strategized and invested in the city to make it a seat of economic and political power in the American West. And it was civic promoters who created the necessary infrastructure in Denver to support the boom of opera examined in this dissertation, including a growing number of cultural enterprises: the newspapers, clubs, and theatres that publicized, supported, and presented everything from minstrels shows to opera, from works by local composers on mine-jumping and Denverites' relations with the indigenous nations, to the standard repertoire of Offenbach, Verdi, and Wagner.

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[15] Dana EchoHawk, "Colorado Ethnic Groups," in *Colorado: A Historical Atlas*, ed. Thomas J. Noel (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 290.

[16] Gunther Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 3–5; 184–185. Barth's theory of fragmentary culture as a "state of mind" is reminiscent of Louis Hartz's discussion of colonization as the process of "fragmentation," where ideological characteristics and practices of a specific part of European society are partitioned off from others, creating societies characterized by ideological monopoly and isolation. See Louis Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies: Studies in the History of the States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada and Australia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1964).

In this context, it is unsurprising that the phrases "booster," "boom," and "boom town" originated in the United States during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, though in practice they influenced the whole period of Western expansion during the 1840s through the early twentieth century. They describe the journalists, land speculators, and commercial entrepreneurs who published positive evaluations of a city's economic prospects to effect growth and prosperity. Boosters communicated to outsiders a message of self-promotion to persuade investment in the urban frontier, while also mobilizing among residents a sense of civic pride and enthusiasm for local improvement.[17] In Denver, boosters emphasized the continuity between eastern cities and their own, making the young metropolis seem familiar and inviting.

The principal vehicle for boosterism were newspapers, which played an active role in settlement and urbanization. Publishers enthusiastically promoted cities and their amenities in print to attract more residents, seeking "to obliterate the frontier," as historian of Western journalism William Lyon wrote, and to "civilize" the rural West by introducing that which was familiar from "back home."[18] One such publisher and early Denver leader was William N. Byers (1831–1903), whose personal interests in boosterism and culture inclined his own pursuits when he arrived in Denver on April 17, 1859. Instead of panning gold from streams to make his fortune, Byers established Denver's first circulated newspaper, the *Rocky Mountain News*, on April 23, 1859, reportedly beating a competitor from press to street corner by twenty minutes.[19]

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[17] Carl Abbott, "Boosterism," in *Encyclopedia of American Urban History*, edited by David R. Goldfield (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007), 88–89.

[18] William H. Lyon, "The Significance of Newspapers on the American Frontier," *Journal of the West* 19, no. 2 (April 1980): 3–13. On the broader questions of newspapers in stimulating Western development, booster presses, and their centrality to fulfilling manifest destiny, see Barbara Cloud, *The Coming of the Frontier Press: How the West Was Really Won* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), as well as David Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink: Journalism in the Old West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

[19] Byers was born into a family of farmers in central Ohio and moved west to Omaha in 1853 to work as a land surveyor and cartographer. William E. Huntzicker, "Media," in *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, edited by David J. Wishart (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 501–502; Barbara Hudson, "Rocky Mountain News History

Figure 1 Alfred Waud, "An Armed Neutrality" (1869), engraved by G. H. Hayes. William Byers is shows seated at a table, pen in hand, while workmen run the presses with shotguns and whiskey bottles scattered about the floor. Also note the advertisement for the *Rocky Mountain News* next to advertisements for the Vigilance Committee, Miners' Convention, and the Denver Theatre. Found in Albert Richardson, *Beyond the Mississipp*i (Hartford, CT: American Publishing, 1869), 291.

As Denver's first newspaper man, he reported predominately on financial and mineral interests, the chief concerns of the fifty-niners—the first wave of miners who streamed into the Pike's Peak Country in 1859. He also reported on life in Denver, hoping that promises of fortune and a comfortable life would draw more economic capital and residents. His entrepreneurial spirit extended to the city of Denver itself, and by way of his writing and philanthropy became its most active booster. Byers established the original Chamber of Commerce, swayed popular and political opinion with his writing, blasted the Union Pacific Railroad when it bypassed Denver as

Timeline," *Denver Post*, February 27, 2009, http://www.denverpost.com/2009/02/26/rocky-mountain-news-history-timeline/; Richard E. Wood, *Here Lies Colorado: Fascinating Figures in Colorado History* (Helena, MT: Farcountry Press, 2005), 41–44. The *Rocky Mountain News* (hereafter *RMN* in footnotes) issued its last newspaper on February 27, 2009, just short of its 150th year.

a hub because of a "few hills" to the west, and is credited with crowning Denver the "Queen City of the Plains." The *News* chronicled many facets of life in early Denver and served as the initial bridge between the mining camp's inhabitants and the culture they had left behind. With its typical "civilizing" and effusive literary quality, it was likely Byers who petitioned for the arrival in Denver of professional opera singers in 1864.

Yet in studies of urban development and boosterism in the American West, the presence and function of opera and theatre have been only summarily addressed. Therefore, I argue in this dissertation that opera, its production, and promotion were engaged in the process of urbanizing Denver and curating its civic identity.

Opera in Late Nineteenth-Century America

To situate opera in Denver and the urban frontier, it is necessary to acknowledge scholarship which has demonstrated how the reception of opera in America was defined along class, geographic, and racial lines. The ubiquity of opera and especially English-language opera in nineteenth-century America continues to surprise opera buffs and even some musicologists. This is due in part to the pride of place granted foreign-language opera performed in large eastern cities. Therefore, I engage the work of several scholars who have mined non-traditional veins of reception studies. Concentrating on opera in America during the nineteenth century inherently privileges performances of opera in English almost to the exclusion of foreign-language performances, as well as patrons and artists that were socially, economically, and racially diverse. Therefore, when "grand opera" is referenced here, what is being described is the performance of continental (i.e., predominately Italian and French, and to a lesser extent German) opera in an English translation, and not necessarily French grand opera.

Such an interrogation must begin with patronage: Who attended and therefore financed operatic performances in late-nineteenth century America? At first, we might assume the answer resembled—to borrow a phrase from Sinclair Lewis—the "parakeets set on gilded lotus columns" seen at the Metropolitan Opera: affluent, educated, wealthy members of the social elite.[20] Unfortunately, two influential historians have helped solidify this pernicious perception of opera audiences. Alan Trachtenberg argued that during this period, changes to the culture of cities were motivated predominately by the interests of the wealthy. Spurred on by widening rifts between capitalists and laborers, he argued, a compulsory process of hierarchizing culture and daily affairs was organized by the elite, abetted by a "conspicuous display of philanthropy on the part of wealthy donors, and for status on the part of the gentry, for whom the custodianship of culture provided desirable opportunities for *noblesse oblige*."[21] But his study focuses on private wealth and artistic acquisition among the white upper-class, being only nominally concerned with investigating middle-class culture. Similarly, Lawrence Levine considered philanthropic largesse to be part of the "sacralization of culture;" that is, a process in which the arts (including opera) once widely accessible and highly popular were made less so to middle-class audiences as cultural spaces were sharply defined.[22] In short, Levine argued that members of the elite patronized art institutions, symphonies, museums, and opera houses to convey their power and

[20] The perception of high culture—such as that satirized in Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* of ambitious philistines (patrons) seated in "the stone rotunda, decorated with crown-embroidered velvet chairs and almost medieval tapestries, parakeets set on gilded lotus columns"—is an ossified stereotype of the Gilded Age, one with which real critical analysis must still contend. Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (Suffolk: Richard Clay & Sons, 1922), 156. On representation of opera and operagoers in literary works by Sinclair Lewis, Edith Wharton, and others see Ruth A. Solie, "Fictions of the Opera Box" in *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference*, ed. Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[21] Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), see especially chap. 5 "The Politics of Culture," 140–181, this specific quotation appearing on 145.

[22] Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

status within their own circles. These theories have been regularly applied wholesale in American studies, in histories that remain preoccupied with the upper class. This means that a portion of eastern urban centers and their institutions have become the norm, and those people and places that do not readily fit the model are disregarded.[23] Given this narrative of American "high" culture dominated by the elite, it is unsurprising that grand and comic opera in English—the prevalent forms encountered by middle-class audiences—and their reception in non-East Coast cities remain peripheral to collective perceptions of opera in America.

Since the 1990s, however, scholars have challenged to significant ends this exclusionary narrative. They have considered places other than New York, Boston, or Philadelphia, non-white upper-class groups, and continue to problematize the perception of opera as inaccessible high art, both past and present. Among the key respondents to a class-based interpretation of American culture are Ralph Locke and Joseph Horowitz, while Katherine Preston, Karen Ahlquist, George Martin, and Kristen Turner have pressed onward to illuminate the ways in which not only class, but also gender, language, place, heritage, and race influenced the reception of opera in nineteenth-century America.

While socio-economic realities did fundamentally influence who was attending operatic performances and how they were presented, Ralph Locke charged musicologists toward "a more accurate, multifaceted, and appreciative view of America's music patrons and concertgoers," an

[23] Levine finds this norm in the vestige of New York's Metropolitan Opera, for example, which was one of a very limited number of venues that consistently performed foreign-language opera in the United States; therefore, his case study should be understood as an exception rather than the rule. Among the dissenters to Levine's theories, Joseph Horowitz has shown that American audiences at the end of the nineteenth century were immensely passionate for art music; see, Joseph Horowitz, "'Sermons in Tones': Sacralization as a Theme in American Classical Music," *American Music* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 311–340; Horowitz, "Music and the Gilded Age: Social Control and Sacralization Revisited," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 3, no. 3 (July 2004): 227–245; and Horowitz, *Moral Fire: Musical Portraits from America's fin de siècle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 1–17.

approach this dissertation amplifies and diversifies.[24] He argued that Levine's one-sided emphasis on class motivations—as well has his language, which continues to encourage division between those that *get* "high culture" through accessibility and familiarity and those that *do not*—begets our cloudy understanding of cultural tastemakers and consumers. Granted, an American phenomenon did arise in which Gilded Age cultural institutions were "supported by a coalition of private citizens rather than by a municipality or national government," and complete operas sung in foreign languages were heard in a few institutions.[25] But philanthropic enterprises were also designed to disseminate art widely and make it uplifting for a community, a source of civic pride that bridged socio-economic and racial divisions, and which are central to the popularity of opera in Denver. To elaborate this bridge of culture, Joseph Horowitz analyzed the genres, races, classes, and repertoire that intermingled at a charity concert given by the National Conservatory at Madison Square Garden in 1894. Horowitz offered a cautionary challenge to the class-based cultural conflict espoused by Levine, one which speaks to the intricate social fabric of the late nineteenth century:

> In a concert milieu so cosmopolitan and dynamic, social rites served no predominant purpose . . . it was not the plutocrats who set the tone but such democrats as [Theodore] Thomas, who performed Beethoven and other masters nightly at Central Park Garden, where beer and refreshments were served; or Antonín Dvořák, who as director of the National Conservatory instructed American composers to cull "negro melodies" and Indian chants; or [Anton] Seidl, who preached democracy—missionary work for "good men and women" versus "the rich"—at his twenty-five-cent Brighton Beach concerts on Coney Island; or Henry Krehbiel, who as the "dean" of New York music critics espoused a polyglot America, a national identity rooted not in parentage but in the soil, to fortify and uplift a common culture.[26]

[24] Ralph P. Locke, "Music Lovers, Patrons, and the "Sacralization" of Culture in America," *19th-Century Music* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1993): 150.

[25] Ibid., 172–173.

[26] Joseph Horowitz, "Music and the Gilded Age": 239–240. Horowitz was even more blunt in his rebuttal to Trachtenberg's ferreting of *noblesse oblige*, calling it "an "anti-democratic bias," a "hierarchy of values

Following Locke's and Horowitz's lead, those studying music in nineteenth-century America continue redressing *noblesse oblige* and the sacralization of culture; a compelling area of inquiry has focused on the processes and outcomes of transplanting European art to America.

During the antebellum period, the growing fascination with opera was witnessed in everyday life. Opera was not yet an ornament of fashionable society, but a functional type of entertainment with potential for a broad and engaged social discourse, whether heard on the street corner or in an opera house, parodied by comedians or sung by the greatest vocal stars of the day. Walt Whitman articulated the effect of opera upon cultural awareness in an 1855 article for *Life Illustrated*: "This is science! This is art! You envy Italy, and almost become an enthusiast; you wish an equal art here, and an equal science and style, underlain by a perfect understanding of American realities, and the appropriateness of our national spirit and body also."[27] Katherine Preston has shown that all socioeconomic groups engaged with opera in one form or another. In *Opera on the Road*, her consideration of vocal-star troupes, Italian, and English opera companies demonstrated the abundant opportunities for Americans of the period to engage with opera, proving that "most Americans did not consider it as the chosen preserve of the musical and social elite. It was music that was simultaneously cultivated and vernacular."[28]

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corresponding to a social hierarchy of stations or classes," in the same, 230–231; and Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 230–232.

[27] Walt Whitman, *New York Dissected*, ed. Emory Holloway and Ralph Adimari (New York: Rufus Rockwell Wildon, 1936), 22. Italian opera and opera singers were an important influence on Whitman, especially during the 1850s as he worked on *Leaves of Grass*. See Carmen Skaggs, "Embodying Poetic Transcendence: Whitman and Opera," chap. 1 in *Overtones of Opera in American Literature from Whitman to Wharton* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 13–33; Vera Brodsky Lawrence, "'Unloos'd Cantabile': Walt Whitman and the Italian Opera," *Seaport* 26, no. 1 (1992): 38–45.

[28] Katherine K. Preston, *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825–60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 316. "Cultivated and vernacular" references H. Wiley Hitchcock's "apt terms," a delineation similar to Levine's high-low dichotomy, though more carefully applied to musical genres and performance settings. See H. Wiley Hitchcock and Kyle Gann, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 2000), 51.

By tracing the operatic culture of this period, Preston revealed not only the ubiquity of opera in antebellum America, but also the prototypical ways in which singers and companies sustained themselves and fulfilled the demands of diverse audiences. Beyond the East Coast, a vibrant musical life was present across the country, supported by an intricate network of both foreign-born and native itinerant musicians and impresarios. Vocal stars moved freely among any number of troupes and a variety of repertory, representing spoken and musical theatre, high and low entertainment alike. The flexibility required of performers to excel at both is another indication that the splintering of culture along economic lines was far from complete.

New York City, as a cosmopolitan melting pot and the New World center of culture, is the typical starting point for many studies of the period. In John Graziano's edited volume *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840–1900*, two diverging though related methodological trends emerge: one offers documentary-oriented histories of performing European music in New York; another looks more fully at the history of European performers and their influence on the city's musical fabric. The latter realization can then be extrapolated beyond the Eastern Seaboard, as inspired American performers were more likely to press westward with a cosmopolitan, European-based repertoire in the name of Manifest Destiny and the "civilizing" effect of art. In his essay, "An Opera for Every Taste," Graziano considers the abundance and variety of European opera performed in New York from 1862 through 1869. He demonstrates that the variety of more than one thousand performances during this period emulated the ethnic diversity of the city, that opera was a popular entertainment across classes and ethnicity, though contingent on the language of performance. And in the closing essay on musician management and the interconnectedness of musical culture, Preston asserts that while

New York was an important locus of musical activity during the nineteenth century, a similar vibrancy of musical life was present elsewhere in the country.[29]

It was at this time that the canon of popular operas presented in America began to emerge, and specific works acquired a greater meaning among audiences than mere leisure-time entertainment. Opera as spectacle acquired subtle relationships to current affairs, with interpolated musical numbers or a translated performance affecting audience's response to a work, and music more readily conveyed meaning to listeners as they became more familiar with the genre. Specifically, Karen Ahlquist considers in *Democracy at the Opera* how plays that were perceived as amoral—such as Victor Hugo's *Le roi s'amuse* even in Frederick Slous's English translation *Francis the First* (1843)—were accepted "on musical grounds, privileging the musical over the verbal as the primary source of meaning in opera."[30] Opera, then, had the potential to provide moral uplift, to improve social and moral temper, and to "enhance the progress of civilization towards universal rationality and refinement."[31] Ahlquist notes that opera succeeded as a commercial endeavor in New York City because it was "sold by entrepreneurs on the Barnum model and supported by a public that included the city's 'aristocracy' but was open to much of the 'democracy' as well." Yet while opera was used as an instrument of moral and civic education, rifts between opera audiences were beginning to show.

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[29] Hilary Poriss, "She Came, She Sang . . . She Conquered?: Adelina Patti in New York," 218–234; John Graziano, "An Opera for Every Taste: The New York Scene, 1862–1869," 253–272; Katherine K. Preston, ""Dear Miss Ober": Music Management and the Interconnections of Musical Culture in the United States, 1876–1883," 273–298; all collected in John Graziano, ed., *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840–1900* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006).

[30] Karen Ahlquist, *Democracy at the Opera Music, Theater, and Culture in New York City, 1815–60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 166.

[31] Ibid., 39–47.

During the 1870s, wealthy Americans, especially those located in East Coast cities, began to support opera production on their own, shutting out the middle class from their seats in the upper balconies with prohibitive ticket prices.[32] In response, the middle class reoriented toward the patronage of opera in English, allowing them to direct their affections toward American performers in order to promote a cosmopolitan, "American" interpretation of European opera.[33] This aspect of this dissertation is largely indebted to the research presented by Katherine Preston in *Opera for the People: English-Language Opera and Women Managers in Late 19th-Century America*, which has been an indispensable resource, and is referenced throughout this dissertation. For those of us who are currently working on opera in nineteenth-century America, *Opera for the People* has already become a gold standard of source material and commentary, and it will continue to suggest new avenues for researchers in the decades to come.[34]

Kristen Turner's recent dissertation has brought the conversation regarding Gilded Age culture around to grand opera performed in English translation. Turner has demonstrated that, as the century progressed, the delineation between performers of foreign-language and English-language opera became more distinct, as did their audiences. Opera in English translation was

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[32] As industrialists and financiers forced access to institutions from whence they were once excluded by the old mercantile elite, the New York Academy of Music and the Metropolitan Opera House became competitive institutions between old money and new. See Sven Beckert, "The Culture of Capital," in *The Monied Metropolis*, 246–248. But, to quote the title of Ford Madox Ford's literary portrait of Gotham and of the country to which it is attached and contrasted, "New York is not America." See Ford, *New York is Not America: Being a Mirror to the States* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1927).

[33] Daniel S. Malachuk, "Nationalist Cosmopolitics in the Nineteenth Century," in *Cosmopolitics and the Emergence of a Future*, ed. Diane Morgan and Gary Banham (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 139–62. A discussion of cosmopolitanism and "nationalist cosmopolitanism" (Malachuk's term to describe those intellectuals who saw nationalism and cosmopolitanism as parallel, mutually reinforcing positions) was a central point of discussion in a colloquy convened by Dana Gooley, "Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Nationalism, 1848–1914," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 523–549; see in that colloquy Katherine K. Preston, "Opera is Elite / Opera is Nationalist: Cosmopolitan Views of Opera Reception in the United States, 1870–90," 535–539.

[34] Katherine K. Preston, *Opera for the People*: *English-Language Opera and Women Managers in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

patronized primarily by the white middle class, while wealthier white individuals attended foreign-language performances. Therefore, the two groups did not regularly intermingle at the theatre.[35] For both parties, opera played an important role in class and identity formation. But the separation of the two modes of production does not suggest, as Lawrence Levine would have it, that wealthy East Coast families locked away *all* opera in order to keep it only for the enjoyment of the American bourgeoisie (Sven Beckert's term). The separation only shows that the mode of producing opera in translation allowed the art to serve a comparable function for the middle class.[36]

Adding to this body of scholarship, my dissertation examines the implications of opera in the frontier and how its presence expressed the cultured identity Denverites strove to establish. This work will show that opera in Denver during this era was aspirational, opera was a commodity, and opera was part of a social program engineered by Denver's civic boosters to represent the young metropolis favorably to the world. By drawing connections to studies of race, ethnicity, class, immigration, and civic identity, my dissertation reinvigorates a study of opera, civic identity, and urban life in the American West during the nineteenth century.

Overview of Chapters

During the mid- to late-nineteenth century, opera was foremost a novel entertainment for Americans that pleased all the senses, available to any that could afford entry to the new democratic Main Street theatres built to house a patchwork of entertainments. Cultivated by a

[35] "In 1874, for instance, the Clara Louise Kellogg English Opera Company's repertoire contained works that had been done many times in New York by foreign-language companies. Yet according to one critic, such repetition did not matter 'as the patrons of English opera are not those of Italian opera.'" "Amusements," *New York Times*, 22 January 1874; quoted in Kristen M. Turner, "Opera in English: Class and Culture in America, 1878–1910" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015), 43–44.

[36] Turner, "Opera in English," 403–405.

growing number of impresarios and traveling troupes, Denverites adored those works and American singers that presented an accessible experience by performing in English. What must be overcome in the historiography of opera in America, however, is the notion that a passion for opera was not present outside of the East Coast urban centers. English-language opera, as Katherine Preston has demonstrated, was a regular component of the American theatrical experience, wherever Americans were found in substantial enough numbers. Opera was "for the people," and this dissertation examines several of the ways Denverites' made opera a part of their social existence.

The chapters of this dissertation navigate the relationship between opera in Denver and place-making, identity, civic boosterism, the prevalence of English-language opera, and amateurism and leisure. They examine the role of opera in Denver's public life and fill a void in new Western history, which continues to curb much discussion of "high" culture. Likewise, they complement urban musicology and place studies that emphasize New York, Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, and San Francisco over other cities of the mid and far West.

Chapter One examines the arrival of opera in Denver in 1864, placing this story in the context of the city's efforts to be seen as refined and cultured. The Gruenwalds, a soprano and baritone duo from San Francisco, first sang opera at the Denver Theatre, a large room above one of the town's first saloons, to an audience of miners, shopkeepers, and independent laborers. I consider their performance an effort to exert what one city leader called a "civilizing influence" on the urban frontier. Music criticism that appeared in the local press elucidates part of this civilizing process by going to great lengths to educate pioneer audiences on this novel art form. Furthermore, I position this purported construction of civility against the actualities of brutal violence and dispossession of native peoples happening on the city's doorstep.

Chapter Two examines performances by the Howson English-language opera bouffe company, starring Emma and Clelia Howson, and by Marie Aimée and her French *opéras bouffes* company. These case studies reflect Denver's participation in the Offenbach craze in America, whether his works were experienced in English translations or through the original French librettos. Finally, ongoing debates between city boosters regarding the acute need for a legitimate theatre are set against the successes and failures met by two of the better-known opera companies of the nineteenth-century—the Alice Oates and the Caroline Richings-Bernard opera companies. These case studies characterize opera in Denver while it was still isolated from major cultural centers and not a regular stop on transcontinental tours.

Chapter Three begins with the opening of Denver's Tabor Grand Opera House by the Emma Abbott English Opera Company in 1881. I argue that this structure and Horace Tabor's *noblesse oblige* were designed to represent Denver's prosperity to the rest of the nation as the city became a hub of commerce and tourism. Opera and the Tabor Grand broadcast not only the city's growing affluence, but also the stability of its economy and its growing population that could patronize them. Within the context of the Tabor Grand Opera House, I consider how English-language opera and opera in translation enmeshed Denver in cultural exchange at a national level. This chapter also makes a place-oriented contribution to the growing literature on American musical culture that considers opera in the late-nineteenth century as mainstream and populist, further illuminating the emergence of middle-class opera connoisseurs. Finally, I contrast the fervor for English-language opera with those few foreign-language performances given at the Tabor Grand in 1884 by Her Majesty's Opera Company under the management of James Mapleson. Despite his success elsewhere and management of some of the greatest star singers of the day—Etelka Gerster, Lillian Nordica, and Adelina Patti—Mapleson found it all

but impossible to fill the Tabor Grand, and opera houses across the country for that matter, on account of inflated ticket prices and the attendant image of foreign-language opera as entertainment for the wealthy.

Chapter Four examines vernacular opera performances in Denver given by amateur societies and opera clubs. This began with the enthusiasm for performances of Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* by local musicians in 1877, including productions offered by juvenile companies and competing church and civic choral organizations. Though amateur performances of opera have been largely overlooked by musicologists, Ian Bradley tellingly described such performances of light opera as "the folk music of the middle classes."[37] Centering around the Colorado-themed operetta *Brittle Silver*, which was premiered at the Tabor Grand Opera House in 1882, the second portion of this chapter speaks to the creation of an original opera in Denver. *Brittle Silver* dealt explicitly with contemporary local issues, including miner labor disputes, class divisions, and Denverites' relations with the Ute nation. In this surprising context, I argue that we find in Denver's amateur operatic societies an active discussion—even debate—over the city's self-promotion and political environment.

Reaching beyond the implications of amateur music-making for sociability and the community formed in relation to music, Ruth Finnegan's scholarship on musical pathways provides an instructive method for thinking about the symbolic depth of collective music-making and amateur organizations.[38] Different forms of musical activity—be they centered in church chancels or the opera house—are not random or created from nothing by individual practitioners. Instead, they are constructed along series of familiar routes, or personal networks, which people

[37] Ian C. Bradley, *The English Middle Classes are Alive and Kicking* (London: Collins, 1982), 210.

[38] Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013).

share with others. Musical societies acted as nodal points within wider networks of overlapping social and personal interests.[39] In addition to functioning as tools for music-making, promotion, and production, these paths are symbolic constructs, representing the position of the self within a community of like-minded, creative individuals. Organizing and working in a musical world were means by which participants "identified themselves as worthwhile members of society and which they regarded as of somehow deep-seated importance to them as human beings."[40] Though practiced by a minority of musical participants and their audience, their social networks were linked into a wide variety of institutions, settings, and other associations within the city. Collective creative action, such as the production of opera, afforded musical Denverites the opportunity to transcend the mundane and negotiate their place within a community of musicians and supporters. In addition to their efforts to create community theater, amateur musicians were also part of the core audience whenever professional companies filled the boards, presenting to and for Denver ideals of cultivation and refinement.

Chapter Five extends this consideration of avocational performances of opera to those given by African American musicians in Denver. This begins in the late 1870s, when African American musicians began to redress the relationship between minstrelsy and opera. Some integrated vernacular musical traditions, minstrelsy, and opera in original works that celebrated blackness. Others rejected these traditions in an effort to create a "school" of black opera, legitimized by its similarities to European opera and its liberation from minstrelsy. In the first place, I analyze the Hyers Sisters' 1879 performance in Denver of the ballad opera *Out of*

[39] On organization structures, authority, and the function of networks to raise social capital and resources for organizations, see Charles Kadushin, "Organizations and Networks," in *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[40] Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians*, 306.

Bondage, which endeavored to legitimize operatic performances by African Americans by placing opera arias alongside genres that permitted them authorship. In the latter, I consider the first of many attempts made by composer Harry Lawrence Freeman to ingratiate opera to black intellectuals. *The Martyr* (1893) premiered at the German dance hall and theatre, with a cast of amateurs assembled from the various black churches and social societies around the city. While striving to write in the European operatic tradition at the exclusion of black vernacular traditions in music, *The Martyr* is nevertheless an origins narrative, one whose libretto casts the Exodus of Israel from Egypt upon emancipation and the landscape of the new African America. In this work, we begin to see the composer's careful navigation of his taste for European opera and the adaptability required of African American composers attempting to integrate the genre.

Denver is a city not currently on the map of American opera history, nor cultural studies more broadly. This dissertation fills several gaps in Western urban history by considering problems of race, ethnicity, class, and civic identity through the ambitious, often irrational lens of opera production. Within this study, I explore the complex relationships among settlers and native nations and nonwhite populations, theatrical representations of class and society, opera in the Western economy and its tooling as social uplift, and investigate the extent to which opera and related genres were involved in building the city of Denver and the urban frontier.

CHAPTER ONE

Civilizing Audiences and the First Strains of Opera in Denver

Tho' far away from Oakland and Aesthetic cultivation
We must observe in any land the customs of our nation.
We've left our party gowns at home, but cannot leave behind us
The old ideas of culture and the rules that used to bind us.[1]

Secreted in a long-silent aria, these lines by the all but forgotten librettist and critic Randolph Hartley seem almost unworthy of serious commentary. Yet knowing where and when they were first sung reveals a rich reading of their hackneyed rhymes, and reflects on their original audience. A mother directs them toward her daughter in one of the few extant arias from Henry Houseley's *The Juggler*.[2] This work, which premiered at Denver's Broadway Theater on May 23, 1895, was a locally created operetta, one of several self-referential musical-theatrical works produced by Denverites, a tradition more thoroughly explored in chapter four. The story takes place in an imagined American colony in West Africa, which was founded, similar to

[1] Randolph Hartley and Henry Houseley, *The Juggler*, I. 4; as transcribed in Sanford Abel Linscome, "A History of Musical Development in Denver, Colorado, 1858–1908" (DMA diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1970), 442. In the course of his research, Linscome examined manuscript copies of a chorus and two solo part books, those for the characters Phyllis (the daughter) and Mrs. William Merrivale (the mother). The Colorado television mogul and politician Carl Williams was in possession of these manuscripts, which were formerly owned by his brother David "McK" Williams, a composer and organ student of Henry Houseley. Linscome had the opportunity to transcribe five musical excerpts for inclusion in his dissertation; the examples included two choruses and this aria from act one, and a chorus and aria from act three; see figures 3–7 in Ibid., 441–445. Linscome did not list the full contents of the musical selections included in the partbooks. The present location of these manuscripts is regrettably unknown.

[2] Henry Houseley (1851–1925) came to Denver in March 1888 as associate organist at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John in the Wilderness, where he was employed for thirty-six years and served as principal organist from 1892. He was also the organist at Temple Emanu-El, music director of Denver's chapter of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite body of Masons, and a founding member of the American Guild of Organists. See *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Houseley, Henry," by Sanford A. Linscome, https://doi.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2088616; Linscome, "Henry Houseley, Versatile Musician of Early Denver," *Colorado Magazine* 49 (Winter 1972): 1–18.

Denver, to mine and export precious metals to an imperial center. To dissuade her daughter from marrying below her station, the mother sings of their family's erudite past, reminding the daughter of her genteel upbringing, and the customs they must observe in spite of their remoteness from their homeland and its institutions.[3] Given the parallels between the setting of the opera and Denver's own reason for existence, the mother's argument begs the questions: To what degree had Denverites maintained their "aesthetic cultivation" while urbanizing the frontier? And how did they make sense of the customs, old ideas of culture, and the opera they were watching in the American West? These questions are a starting point for a study that seeks to understand how opera helped shape Denver and Denverites' ideas of civilization, status, and social harmony. By unpacking this quatrain, we can begin to understand the reasons behind the transference of opera and operatic culture to the American frontier, while also exploring the connections between opera and imperialist social agendas.

Perhaps Hartley and Houseley included these lines, which idealize the primacy of American aesthetic cultivation and traditions, to remind the audience that one generation earlier, Denver was incorporated by settlers who had their own standards of respectability and social practices to maintain. The mother may have been encouraging the audience to uphold respectable customs recently transferred to the frontier, even in spite of difficult circumstances—either the political upheaval happening in the opera's imagined African West, or the very real economic depression hitting Denver following the Panic of 1893. Falling on ears thirty years after the first

[3] Mezzo-soprano Lottie Cruikshank (1857–1930), who split her residence between Aspen and Denver from 1892, sang the role of Mrs. Merrivale in *The Juggler*. Cruikshank was beloved for her community service, and something of a local legend for supposedly performing Katisha in the first unauthorized performances of *The Mikado* in the United States in Chicago in July1885. This detail of Cruikshank's musical career was presented as a fact in the *Denver Republic's* review of her performance in *The Juggler*, see 12 May 1895, 12; and later repeated (with some skepticism) in a review of another performance of *The Mikado* given in "Music in Boston," *Musical Courier* 35, no. 23 (8 December 1897), 26.

strains of opera were heard in Denver, the mother echoes a narrative that commerce *and* culture were essential to achieving colonial/national expansion, and that imperial pride was about cultural institutions as much as it was about economic progress. As musicologist William Weber has observed in his studies of opera in European capital cities, opera patronage emerged out of an aggressive promotion of the state and negotiations of cosmopolitanism, and customarily helped define a city's tastes and social practices.[4] Similarly, early nineteenth-century cities in the eastern United States with vibrant operatic cultures, such as New York, Washington, DC, and Boston, were viewed as places of importance. This was not solely on account of the presence of opera, of course, but such conditions did buoy the reputation and projected affluence of these cities. Opera and operatic culture, including the customs, fashions, and symbols of patronizing the opera, exemplified the regional importance of these cities, as well as the sophistication of their middle- and upper-class populations. Given the similar conditions of state promotion and expansion present in the American West during the nineteenth century, a comparable relationship between opera and cultural authority existed in fledgling Denver.

This chapter centers on critical and popular responses to transferred cultural artifacts, specifically the earliest performances of opera in Denver. My objective is to explain how establishing Denver's legitimate theaters was sanctioned within the larger civilizing mission undertaken by settlers, and how attending operatic performances constituted an act of social transformation or pioneer audiences' cultivation as described in *The Juggler*. Opera had the

[4] Weber has considered opera's cultural and social capital in London, Vienna, and Paris during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and specifically the ways cultural authority in these cities was perceived and replicated by other societies; see William Weber, "The Cultural Authority of the Capital City," in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, eds. Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher, and Thomas Ertman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 160–180; William Weber, "The Cultural Explosion: An Overview," chap. 2 in *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna Between 1830 and 1848*, 2nd ed. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

potential to displace disreputable entertainments offered in early Denver and could help shape the developing metropole. Doing so required audience's enculturation and education in the traditions of opera and theater, a task journalists and boosters were eager to undertake. Audiences were not homogenous, however, and their responses to legitimate theater and opera varied and took different forms.

For the predominately Anglo- and European-American settlers who built Denver, there was certainly some identification with the mother in *The Juggler* and her concerns. In the first place, settlers of the Colorado Territory intended to get rich by excavating and exporting silver to markets in the United States, in much the same way as the opera's chorus of miners. Moreover, they believed in the inevitability of an American empire, in a pre-destined right to dominate the continent, and their obligation to spread Americans and their social and cultural practices to the frontier.[5] With the collective force of Manifest Destiny driving westward expansion, settlers also sought personal progress; as they unearthed material riches, they also cultivated comfortable lives that were bounded by cosmopolitan culture and social norms. Denver's colonialist technologies (railways and smelters), economies (mining and tourism), and political systems (republicanism and the importance of private property) harmonized with their organizing of typical social practices of the time, such as attending a theater performance or playing operatic selections on the family's parlor piano.

Collectivized hope and aspirations of sophistication transcended, as James Belich has written, "the mundane pursuit of economic maximization" in settler societies. Denver succeeded

[5] As William E. Weeks has noted, three themes were usually expounded by advocates of manifest destiny: "the special virtues of the American people and their institutions; their mission to redeem and remake the world in the image of America; and the American destiny under God to accomplish this sublime task. Under the aegis of virtue, mission, and destiny evolved a powerful nationalist mythology that was virtually impossible to oppose." William E. Weeks, *Building the Continental Empire: American Expansion from Revolution to the Civil War* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 1996), 61.

in its colonialist agenda not only by dominating nature and producing material wealth for the benefit of the American empire, but also by indoctrinating settler populations in the rules of expansionist ideologies and bringing them under centralized understandings of power and culture. Settlers believed that one benefit of cloning colonial tendencies in the urban frontier would be the conferral of metropolitan status.[6] In the interest of legitimacy and permanency, the American frontier had to be made to look and feel familiar, with Denver serving as an imperial metropole in the vast continent. The city's cosmopolitanism, which encompassed cultural refinement, civic institutions, and community unity, had to be shaped, controlled, and contained.[7] Therefore, it is instructive to read colonialist discourses onto pioneer theaters and their productions. Opera was among the artifacts of material culture that Denverites chose to reproduce in the frontier, and its systematic institutionalization signaled the ambitions and desired maturity of the city and its citizens.[8]

Communities and individuals express their identity in both the reception and creation of art. As was the case in communities across the country during the nineteenth century, Denverites constructed their identity through the display of carefully selected elements of a materialist culture—including opera and its accessories.[9] Long before *The Juggler*, it was commonplace for

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[6] James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 164–168.

[7] J. Philip Gruen, *Manifest Destinations: Cities and Tourists in the Nineteenth-Century American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).

[8] Philipp Ther has examined a similar transfer of opera from European capitals to small cities in Central Europe, and the building of opera houses in ascendant cities. Ther argues that opera was transferred for its power as "a marker of prestige by which its patrons demonstrated their wealth and power, and hence was a very political institution. As an art form, opera was at the heart of society." Smaller cities were replicating "A European ideal of civilization . . . Opera houses in ascendant cities mounted [canonic works] partly because it signified their aspirations and was perceived as a sign of cultural maturity." Philipp Ther, *Center Stage: Operatic Culture and Nation Building in Nineteenth-Century Central Europe*, trans. Charlotte Hughes-Kreutzmüller (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2014), 1–2, 239.

[9] Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). The correlation between objects, possession and festishization, consumption patterns, and social mobility is central to Miller's study.

Denver boutiques to sell tailored opera cloaks and inlaid opera glasses. Boardwalks and promenades made of polished red rock lined the streets to keep petticoats dustless. Operagoers could buy libretti and "parlor pianist" collections with their favorite arias printed in simplified piano transcriptions. They were also seeing *The Juggler*—a musical-theatrical embodiment of the city's aesthetic cultivation—in not the first, but the second sumptuous theater built in Denver in ten years. Opera in Denver—the "Queen city of the plains and peaks," as Walt Whitman remembered it—was more a product of emulation than distinction as the city pursued a mature and refined image, one steeped in the customs of the nation and old ideas of culture.[10]

Whereas the appearance of opera in the American West will be examined shortly, it is also pertinent to introduce contemporary reflections on what the mother may have meant by "culture." By the time Hartley and Houseley were writing *The Juggler*, Matthew Arnold and Edward Burnett Tylor had articulated their theories of culture, which were widely disseminated in both Victorian Britain and the United States. Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* took an idealist approach by defining culture as something worth striving for: "being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know . . . the best which has been thought and said in the world, and, through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits."[11] For Arnold, culture was a moral and aesthetic ideal to be pursued by a society as an antidote to the anarchy of materialism, industrialism, and self-interest. In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor's more descriptive, anthropological definition regarded culture as that which social groups already possessed and used to identify themselves: "that complex whole which

[10] Walt Whitman, who "fell in love with Denver, and even felt a wish to spend [his] declining and dying days there," traveled through the Rocky Mountains in September of 1879; see *Specimen Days and Collect* (Philadelphia: Rees Welsh, 1882), 146–147.

[11] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1869), viii.

includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [an individual] as a member of society."[12] At this juncture in the mid-nineteenth century, "culture" changed from describing the natural growth of a thing (typically animal or vegetable) into the thing itself, the experience of daily life and the fashioning of identities. Arnold and Tylor's definitions presaged Raymond Williams's synthesizing observations that culture was used to mean "the general state of intellectual development, in a society as a whole" and with the body of the arts "a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual."[13] Culture was both a thing to be developed and an ideal to be pursued.

That the mother in *The Juggler* references party gowns in projecting culture suggests that such practices, attitudes, and values are performed. That is, they are created and sustained by actions, such as dressing in the latest fashions to attend a performance at the theater, and social exchanges, which contribute to her daughter's intellectual and personal cultivation. At the same time, the mother implies the inverse: If her daughter disengaged from her inherited culture, no longer taking part in the customs her family transferred to West Africa, she would no longer be a member of the group, but an outsider kept apart by her lack of sentiment toward American aesthetic cultivation.[14] A similar anxiety troubled Denver's civically oriented pioneers—especially those who were charged with promoting the image of the young city—as they dealt with unruly renegades and the day-to-day hardships of settling the West.

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[12] Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (London: John Murray, 1871), 1.

[13] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), xvi.

[14] In Kwame Anthony Appiah's recent study of types of identity, he has situated culture as a means of classifying human beings and establishing identities, much in the same way that creed, country, color, and class do. "Cultural identities," he writes, "are manifest in the temptation to imagine that people's origins make them either inheritors of, or outsider to, Western civilization;" see *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* (New York: Liveright, 2018), 5, and especially chapter six, "Culture."

Within the historical moment examined here, there is also the opportunity to propose a decolonized reading of the history of opera in the American West. While it would be easy to overlook the contemporaneous dispossession of traditional territories and the denial of indigenous rights, doing so dignifies to a fault the violence and social systems instituted to help "civilize" early Colorado. The transference of cherished Euro-American traditions such as opera to the frontier did, in fact, occur at the same time as the subjugation of indigenous cultures. The proximity of purportedly dignified social activities to colonial violence requires that this project deal frankly with all aspects of the imperial effort to urbanize the frontier. Though introducing opera in Denver was celebrated for its civilizing possibilities, the self-same audience's sanctioning of and participation in dispossessing native peoples at Denver's doorstep was not far out of mind for those looking at Denver from the outside. Therefore, this messy and muddled confusion of civility and violence should not be written out of an examination of early Denverites' cosmopolitan aspirations.

Civilizing the Urban Frontier

In 1866, English traveler and writer W. Hepworth Dixon toured the American West. The following year he published his recollections in *New America*, a travelogue and survey of American social and religious movements. He remembered Denver and its citizens to his readers in a most unflattering light: "As you wander about these hot and dirty streets, you seem to be walking in a city of demons."[15] He described a town where murder, shootouts, gambling, and brothels were routine. "A perfect pandemonium," as one journalist scathingly paraphrased

[15] William Hepworth Dixon, *New America*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1867), 1:131; for his larger discussion of Denver, see 125–134; on depictions of Denverites' involvement in the Sand Creek Massacre, see 60–63. *New America* was published in eight English editions in the United States and Great Britain in the first year alone, and several translations were made available in French, Russian, Italian, German, and Dutch.

Dixon's take to local readers, "ruled by a vigilance committee, in which the life of a decent man is never safe."[16] The *Rocky Mountain News* branded his comments libelous, and the only reason someone would pick up a copy was to know what a "damphool" Dixon was.[17] Although Dixon's representation may have been neither accurate nor impartial, the city nevertheless had a serious public relations problem to address, and local citizens were eager to disprove his assessments.[18] Boosters began print campaigns to counter perceptions of Denver as a savage outpost, and city officials rapidly put laws in place to counter much offensive behavior, arranging almost every aspect of the city to exhibit Denver as well-regulated.[19]

It was not, however, the city that initially lured travelers westward. Magazines, guidebooks, poetry, and paintings portrayed natural landscapes peopled with rowdy miners and bands of Native Americans. The realities of Western urbanization came as quite a shock to many, then, and even disappointed some.[20] When Victorian traveler Isabella Bird toured the

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[16] *RMN*, 11 March 1867, 4.

[17] "Hepworth Dixon's book on America, and Colorado in particular, is on sale at Woolworth & Moffat's. Get one if you would know what a damphool he is;" *RMN*, 17 May 1867, 4. The swiftness with which guidebooks and travelers' accounts of the American West were generated is discussed in David Hamer, *New Towns in the New World: Images and Perceptions of the Nineteenth-Century Urban Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 167–168.

[18] In his chapters on the American West, Dixon was most interested in revising British sentiments toward Mormonism and argued that Salt Lake City residents were "exemplary settlers." On Dixon and Victorian perceptions of the American West, see Sebastian Lecourt, "The Mormons, the Victorians, and the Idea of Greater Britain," *Victorian Studies* 56, no. 1 (2013): 85–111. Likely the most popular and scurrilous representation of Mormonism in nineteenth-century British culture appeared in the first Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson novel, Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (London: Ward Lock, 1887).

[19] Anxieties about Denver's image to the rest of the country did not readily subside, however. A year later, his words still stung, and the *News* published a front-page editorial to contest what had been presented as fact, believing that what Dixon wrote was adversely affecting emigration rates and civic development; *RMN*, 14 May 1868, 1. In 1870, another travel writer questioned Denverites on their resentment of Dixon's description, with one respondent stating: "Denver never at any time was half as bad as he describes it; [it] was a perfectly quiet and orderly town;" John White, *Sketches from America Part I—Canada; Part II—A Pic-nic to the Rocky Mountains; Part III—The Irish in America* (London: Sampson Low, Son, & Marston, 1870), 312–316.

[20] Contrasting boosters' portrayal of western cities with how tourists perceived them, J. Philip Gruen has argued that nineteenth-century promotional literature romanticized western cities as monuments to the civilizing of the West. What tourists discovered in western cities, however, was often "less sensational . . . and more prosaic," and many

American West in 1873, she reported that Denver was "no longer the Denver of Hepworth Dixon." Rather, she found a great braggart city with the "usual deformities and refinements of civilization."[21] Denver had become too civilized for an adventurer like Isabella Bird—urbane, gentrified, and dull. She found herself longing for the isolated and intoxicating mountains that lay to the city's west. One of the deformities of civilization she was especially disappointed to find were the theaters. In combination with other promotional efforts, civic boosters used theater to impose a "civilizing influence" or "mission." Having a populace fully indoctrinated into the ideals of civility would improve perceptions of respectability and cultivation, and help Denver earn a civilized, metropolitan status.

Examining "civilization" and "civilizing missions" is a fraught exercise, especially as they relate to the transfer of highly valued Euro-American cultural traditions to traditionally indigenous territories. These terms are uncomfortably connected to ideas of racial superiority and colonial predestination. Their historical and even contemporary usage connote ethnocentric views of socio-political power and cultural achievement. According to the 1847 edition of Noah Webster's *American Dictionary*, "to civilize" entailed introducing "civility [politeness] of manners among a people" and instructing them "in the arts of regular life." Being a civilized

seemed to have little separating them from other modern, industrialized cities; see Gruen, *Manifest Destinations*, 34–40.

[21] Isabella Bird, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1882), 159–163. Bird's travelogue of life in the Rockies has been reprinted regularly since it first appeared in London in 1879. It is still stocked at Denver bookstores and in 2013, an elementary school in the Denver Public Schools system was named in her honor. On Bird's representation of Denver and Rockies, as well as her efforts to reconcile cultural ideals of femininity and her authority as a travel writer, see Dúnlaith Bird, "How to Picket-Fence a Mountain: Domesticity and Dislocation in Isabella Bird's Wild West," in *Literary Location and Dislocation of Myth in the Post/Colonial Anglophone World*, ed. André Dodeman and Élodie Raimbault (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 35–52.

populace, from the perspective of intellects and leaders, was to have citizens who were "reclaimed from savage life and manners" and polished "in arts, learning, and civil manners."[22]

Civilizing processes occur on two levels, and there are two faces to "civility" as it relates to opera in Denver. The first is synonymous with "socialization," the second succinctly describes a long-term shaping of standards of behavior within a particular society.[23] First, civility had to be brought forth among frontier settlers in the sense that those who lived in the city had to become dependent on one another for functional relationships within social networks, and to demonstrate caring for the each other and the welfare of the culture they shared.[24] Second, settlers and indigenous people had to be encouraged and rewarded for acting civilly—that is, showing emotional restraint and maintaining an adequately organized society—or be reproofed and corrected by a vigilance committee (or more powerful military forces) if they did not. Not only did theater help develop politeness and customs among Denverites, but it was also seen as part of the justification for the exploitation of land and the violent dispossession of native peoples in the interest of spreading American "civilization."

Norbert Elias understood that civilization is used by a society to describe, in part, "what constitutes its special character and what it is proud of: the level of *its* technology, the nature of *its* manners, the development of *its* scientific knowledge or view of the world, and much more."[25] The civilizing mission, like culture, incorporated imperial values, ways of thinking, and

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[22] *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, comp. Noah Webster (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1857), s.vv. "civility," "civilization," "civilize."

[23] The observations that civilizing and decivilizing processes occur on two levels have had a defining influence on figurational sociology, and are central to the theories of Norbert Elias; see primarily *The Civilizing Process*, first printed in 1939, and published in paperback in English and German in 1976.

[24] This definition of civility has been drawn from Benet Davetian, *Civility: A Cultural History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 9.

[25] Emphasis original. Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 3–4.

modes of organizing social systems.[26] Elias also characterized the civilizing process by its means of constraining people and institutions, and its limiting of dangerous and potentially socially disruptive behaviors. Consequently, we can appreciate journalist William Byers's view that theater could serve the civilizing process, propelling civic pride and progress in Denver, and remedy a deficiency of courtesy. It would be a space of social prohibitions, where behaviors and activities practiced elsewhere were not tolerated. Being made "civilized" would carry the expectation that Denverites were peaceful and considerate, dignified, and educated in the art of living a civil life. Although Denver's earliest settlers had considerable individual power, which they exerted in their decision to migrate westward, their newly formed social networks—and by extension, their manifestations of sociability such as attending the theater—also constrained their interactions with one another.[27]

Civilizing projects were also embraced by settlers for practical terms: they were believed to help raise the standard of living and expand market profitability within the new city. Exhibiting a civilized image, as discussed in the introduction, was of importance to Western boosters as they engaged investors and eastern politicians. Such perceptions could stimulate further settlement and economic development, which were necessary to the consolidation of power; or if opinions were not positive, elicit ridicule and embarrassment, and a potential loss of investments. As Edward Said observed: "Every single empire, in its official discourse, has said

[26] The sociogenesis of the concepts of "civilization" and "culture" as reified by Elias is discussed in Eric Dunning and Jason Hughes, *Norbert Elias and Modern Sociology: Knowledge, Interdependence, Power, Process* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 81–87. On the ethnocentric limitations of "civility" (countered with "barbarity") as it relates to the monopolization and subordination of non-dominant groups, see Christopher Powell, *Barbaric Civilization: A Critical Sociology of Genocide* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 126–133. On historic and contemporary debates of the civilizing process in the American West, see Stephen Mennell, *The American Civilizing Process* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 180–213.

[27] On the multi-direction relationship between "individual," "society," the process of domination, as well as a reconsideration of Elias's theory of the civilizing process, see Davetian, *Civility: A Cultural History*, 346–362.

that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort."[28] Culture and theater did enlighten and ennoble audiences who attended performances in Denver's pioneers theaters. Yet what Said also acknowledges is the vested authorization given setters to exert force in order to maintain the civilizing mission—that is, "Western civilization."

While theater could inspire some degree of social control and civility among Denver's citizens, it was also directed outwardly, upon Others living outside of that community. The civilizing process as it related to the power differential between pioneers and indigenous nations was about control. As is well documented in post-colonial histories, the peaceful self-civilizing mission in the American West extended only as far as the boundaries of any one dominant community. When the Euro-American social and material aspects of civilization were not adopted by those inside and outside the dominant group, violence was directly applied to enforce the mission and assert authority. Denverites who attended the theater were replicating a powerful expression of Western civilization, and by extension a manifestation of colonial processes that were used around the world. Opera in Denver was both a tool and an outcome of the city's involvement in this colonial civilizing process.

A Place for Civility: The Social Program of Denver's Pioneer Theaters

In the dog days of August 1860, impresario John S. "Jack" Langrishe (1839–1895) arrived in Denver from Fort Laramie, Wyoming Territory, to arrange for his dramatic company the short-term lease of a performance space. He settled on a makeshift theater called Apollo Hall, which occupied the second floor of a saloon on the town's central boardwalk along what is now

[28] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2014), xxi.

Larimer Street (see Figure 2).[29] The Apollo was a relatively typical venue for entertainment in the American West, being one of the city's lively multi-functional gathering places.

Figure 2 W. G. Chamberlain, "View of Larimer Street in Denver, Colorado," c. 1861. The Apollo Hall is the second building from the left with the pitched roof. This photograph is mounted in an early scrapbook of Denver and Colorado given by the photographer's family. (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, X-19271.)

Since opening the prior September, Apollo Hall played host to religious services, the first legislative meeting of the provisional government of the new territory, and balls when hundreds of men tried to dance with the few women in the city—or, more often, the men would pair up and tie ribbons around their elbows to indicate which partner followed and which led. In a community where most men were single and the few women residents were married, there were several other variety halls doubling as vice dens and brothels.[30] This was not the case at Apollo

[29] Langrishe managed three different theaters in Denver over a decade, and eventually earned himself the sobriquet "Comedian of the Frontier" after more notorious stints in Helena and Deadwood (a period of his life dramatized in HBO's American Western drama series "Deadwood"). When he retired from the stage, he took up a political career in the first State Legislature of Idaho. Langrishe's troupe consisted of seven men, including the leading man Harry Richmond, and two women, including Jeanette Langrishe and her sister Laurette Allen Atwater. Virginia McConnell, "A Gauge of Popular Taste in Early Colorado," *Colorado Magazine* 46 (Fall 1969): 338–350; Alice Cochran, "Jack Langrishe and the Theater of the Mining Frontier," *Colorado Magazine* 46 (Fall 1969): 324–37.

[30] In 1860, it is believed that the ratio of men to women in the Colorado Territory was upwards of sixteen-to-one. Some historians speculate that prostitution was the second-largest profession for working women in the West, second to domestic service. On the female population, social gatherings, and prostitution in early Colorado, see Jan

Hall after Langrishe took over its management, however. He quickly raised its status to that of Denver's principal theatrical venue and a site of professed civility.

Few other impresarios subjected their actors, costumes, and properties to stagecoach travel, let alone the crudeness of pioneer theaters. Consequently, Langrishe and his professional troupe caused a sensation when they arrived in Denver and gave their first performance on September 25, 1860. That evening the Apollo was filled with 350 patrons. Receipts from entry to the evening's performance totaled $300, suggesting that fifty patrons paid with "eggs and produce." For that matter, miners were explicitly—even emphatically—invited to pay their one-dollar admission fee in gold dust.[31] A three-piece band of uncertain instrumentation provided incidental music.[32] This musical complement was not always welcome, however, given that the trio reportedly possessed only two pieces of music, which they alternated nightly, and played whatever section was on top upon opening their scores. Providing dramatically coordinated music to the stage action does not seem to have been the band's objective.[33] Also accompanying the players were the regular interruptions of the "clinking of glasses, rattling of billiard balls, and boozy attempts at vocal melodies from the uproarious regions below." Crammed shoulder-to-shoulder along wooden benches lining the walls and center of the room, spectators gazed on a

MacKell, *Red Light Women of the Rocky Mountains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 1–38, 387n14.

[31] The price of admission is relatively equivalent to US$(2017)28.17. These figures are given as they were relayed by a member of Langrishe's troupe, Harry Richmond, in Melvin Schoberlin, *From Candles to Footlights* (Denver: Old West Publishing, 1941), 43. This is the same Harry Richmond that adapted as a farce James Fenimore Cooper's *Wept of the Wish-Ton-Wish* (discussed later), and who was later accused in Congressional hearings of mutilating Native Americans at the Sand Creek Massacre.

[32] This orchestra of three, though larger, may have been similar in makeup to the orchestra of two that played at the Progressive Hall on Blake Street, where Ed Silsby and George Cushman accompanied dancing and variety shows on fiddle and a small wind organ. See Linscome, "History of Musical Development in Denver," 64–65.

[33] These limited details of music at the Apollo Hall are provided in Franc C. Young, *Echoes from Arcadia* (self-pub., 1903), 37; quoted also in Linscome, "History of Musical Development in Denver," 74–75.

stage illuminated by miners' candles jammed into the knots of once stately ponderosa pines.[34] Over the next week, Langrishe's troupe performed melodramas, farces, and low comedies, with some Shakespeare and a comedy of manners mixed in for good measure.[35]

Two examples further demonstrate the quality of music typically heard in Denver's pioneer theaters. William Larimer, an early settler and land surveyor who is largely credited with founding the city of Denver, recalled that it was fashionable to have some kind of music to attract the attention of passersby and entertain customers:

> Sometimes they would have very fair music, but usually it was quite perfunctory and mechanical. Violins were used principally, and the musicians were usually of the class that took up their wages at the bar. Every little while they would stop playing to get a drink . . . Sometimes a good singer would be introduced to lend added attraction to the music—it was anything to please and draw the crowd.[36]

In another instance, the Denver Hall on Blake Street doubled simultaneously as a gambling establishment and religious gathering space:

> Last evening (Sunday) as we were passing Denver Hall, we were arrested by the sound of well executed sacred music, and on looking in, a strange scene was presented. Some ten or fifteen persons were engaged in gambling at the tables, while nearby stood another party of about an equal number, singing [Isaac Watts's hymn] 'When I can read my title clear.' Their voices rang out clear and melodious, interrupted only occasionally by the clink of silver on the tables, and the call of the dealer, 'make your bets, gentlemen.' We expect to hear preaching in Denver Hall one of these days.[37]

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[34] Jerome C. Smiley, ed., *History of Denver: With Outlines of the Earlier History of the Rocky Mountain Country* (Denver: Denver Times and the Times-Sun Publishing Co., 1901), 235. Smiley's chronicling of the Apollo Theater seems to be predominately drawn from the reminiscences of journalist Albert Deane Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi: From the Great River to the Great Ocean: Life and Adventure on the Prairies, Mountains, and Pacific Coast* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1869), 306–307.

[35] Langrishe's troupe opened their first season with *The Youth Who Never Saw a Woman* and William Bayle Bernard's farce *His Last Legs*, and the typical comic fare was peppered with *Othello* and Richard Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*. A complete listing of the Langrishe company's first season is given in McConnell, "A Gauge of Popular Taste in Early Colorado," 341–342.

[36] Herman S. Davis, *Reminiscences of General William Larimer and of His Son William H. H. Larimer, Two of the Founders of Denver City* (Lancaster, PA: New Era Printing Company, 1918), 184.

[37] *RMN*, 10 December 1860, 3.

What these scenes evidence is the vibrant cultural diversity already present in Denver's saloons and variety halls. It just was not the ideal, cosmopolitan image that the city's boosters wanted available for inspection. If Denver's pioneer theaters could even be said to have an auditorium in the traditional sense, they were scarcely separated from the stage, and raucous, oftentimes performative spectatorship reigned.

Although William Byers favorably reviewed Langrishe's initial performance, he was more interested in prophesying what the performance augured for Denver, and how his fellow citizens would develop their aesthetic cultivation. Apollo Hall, he insisted, could be the symbol of Denverites' attainment of improved gentility and civility:

> Where well conducted, it is generally admitted by the best critics that the drama has exercised a civilizing influence in all new countries, and if so, in no section of the country do we wish to see an innocent and salutary state of things obtain more effectually than here.[38]

Byers tacitly expressed his disapproval of the types of performances presented in Denver to date, implying they were not "well conducted," and neither exercised a civilizing influence nor helped to establish a productive state.[39] He goes on to reiterate his approval of the Apollo's policy against admitting "improper characters," which reaffirmed the distinction between the theater and the other kinds of revelry offered in the saloon below and elsewhere. Moreover, it seems that Byers is hoping for a reformation of the spectators themselves. During the mid-nineteenth century, as Richard Butsch has described, upper and middle-class American audiences began to shift from active to passive spectatorship, and there were an increasing number of social

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[38] *RMN*, 26 September 1860, 2.

[39] Byers had good cause to express an earnest commitment to cultivating a more civil population in Denver. In the summer of 1860, Byers had printed an editorial affronting Charles Harrison for his mismanagement of the "mischievous" Criterion Saloon. Three of Harrison's regulars proceeded to commandeer the *News* office and kidnapped Byers. He was subsequently rescued by Harrison, after the ordeal ended with a shootout in front of the news office. As recounted from contemporary coverage in James A. Crutchfield, *It Happened in Colorado*, 3rd ed. (Guilford, CT: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 47–48.

constrictions in the theater and expectations for how an audience should behave.[40] Evidently encumbered by the desperadoes and sourdoughs among them, however, Denver audiences were behind the times, and far from being the courteously passive listeners found elsewhere. A remedy to this problem would have to include both clearly demarcating the activities of audiences from those of the performers, and of moving toward genres of theatrical entertainment that required attentive listening.

Such attempts to delineate specialized spaces for civilized entertainment were not commonplace in Denver's public houses. At the Criterion or Cibola Halls, which both shared their name with resident minstrel troupes, singing, dancing, boozing, gambling, and philandering went hand in hand. Albert Richardson wrote for the *New-York Tribune* that at these and other establishments, one would meet the "strange medley" of Denver society: "There were Americans from every quarter of the Union, Mexicans, Indians, half-breeds, trappers, speculators, gamblers, desperadoes, broken-down politicians and honest men."[41] Intersocial and intercultural audiences shared these energetic spaces, whose patrons came from all corners of Denver and its environs. Although cheering and fighting would occasionally spill over from the saloon into the performance spaces, the openness and flexibility of these spaces helped sustain Denverites' prolonged enthusiasm for variety entertainment.[42] In these halls, many men and a few women

[40] The shift in audience behavior was largely influenced by placing value on an audience member's respectability and cultivation at the theater. See Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750–1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For a multi-national examination of the transformation in audience behavior during the nineteenth century, especially with respect to the commercializing forces upon theater, see Jennifer Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780–1880* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007), 3–11.

[41] Albert Deane Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi*, 186.

[42] One example of the absence of limits between the saloon experience and the theater is evidenced by the story that one venue had to install a knee-high metal screen in front of its makeshift stage to protect the musicians and dancers from the saloon's patrons. On the multifunctionality of these spaces, see Thomas J. Noel, *The City and the Saloon, Denver, 1858–1916* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 18–19.

took part and delighted in farces, concerts, communal singing, and more, and built a community around enjoying entertainment.

In quintessentially booster terms, however, Byers contended that all new countries progressed through a developmental stage that included opening theaters like the Apollo, an argument that further placed Denver under the mantle of refined European-inspired, American civilization. As was the case in many frontier outposts, Denver residents constructed a community and its identity anew, which often required a pivot away from the individualism that inspired their westward migration.[43] Constructing the ideal Denver, therefore, necessitated the multivalent work of replicating cultural fragments and creating a localized collective self. One way this was accomplished was in the building of institutions and services that fostered a semblance of a familiar life left behind, institutions that fostered the kind of cosmopolitanism and gentility that could withstand outside scrutiny. As part of this process, Byers surmised that if theater had exerted a "civilizing influence" elsewhere, then Denver could similarly benefit. The Apollo and Langrishe's time there became part and parcel of Denver's efforts to develop into an important urban center, one peopled by attentive citizens with markedly improved standards of conduct.

Apart from Byers's initial review of Langrishe's troupe, the civilizing influence of theater remained a part of local discourse. With Langrishe still at the helm a year later, the Apollo was deemed unbefitting the town, and Denverites now required a "more attractive and competitive

[43] An obvious exception to this Western individualism is Salt Lake City, which was founded by an already existent pioneer community of Latter-day Saints in the summer of 1847. There were also those stalwart individualists who did not cede to a communal way of living, retreating instead into the rugged terrain of the Rockies to mine in solitude until luck or fear of starvation required a return to market. See Robin Scott Jensen, "Mormon Colonization of Utah," in *Encyclopedia of Immigration and Migration in the American West*, ed. Gordon M. Bakken and Alexandra Kindell (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006), 468–470.

place of amusement."[44] A rival group led by Henry Murphy opened Denver's new Platte Valley Theater on October 26, 1861, with Shakespeare's *Richard III*. The Platte had a seating capacity nearly double the Apollo, a full gallery occupied by a "living sea of humanity," receipts totaling $600 a night, and a regular board that favored Shakespeare and drama. Langrishe knew that this new theater, which city historian Jerome Smiley called "a pretentious place of amusement" without impartiality, posed a threat.[45]

Four days later, Langrishe announced the expansion of the Apollo, improving its aptness for legitimate theater so that it could compete. He eliminated the saloon and billiards parlor on the first floor, cut away the second floor to make a horseshoe-shaped gallery, decorated the room with white and gold paint, built a parquette with elevated seats at the rear of the main floor, and constructed a stage that was "ten feet deeper than any stage west of Chicago."[46] The *News* called Langrishe's newly christened theater "a perfect gem of a house." Owen J. Goldrick, the territory's first documented schoolteacher and poet laureate, promised in his opening address that the public would find there "beauty, truth and love, and melody." Byers printed Goldrick's complete address, which extolled the genealogy and virtues of the theater with quintessentially Western imagery, reading as a genealogy of drama from ancient Rome to modern Denver, celebrating in the end Langrishe's entrepreneurial spirit.[47] Goldrick's ode encompassed the pride

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[44] *Daily Colorado Republican and Rocky Mountain Herald*, 30 October 1861, 2; also quoted in Margaret Lauterbach and Charles E. Lauterbach, *Comedian of the Frontier: The Life of Actor/Manager Jack Langrishe, 1825–1895* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016), 72. One of Byers's several short-lived competitors, the *Daily Colorado Republican and Rocky Mountain Herald* was published between May 1861 and June 1862.

[45] Review of opening night at the Platte Valley Theater in *RMN*, 28 October 1861, 2; Smiley, *History of Denver*, 335.

[46] "The New People's Theater," *RMN*, 25 November 1861, 3. The stage measured forty-five by thirty feet and was outfitted with "$2000 in new scenery;" the value given the new scenery approximately equivalent to US$(2017)56,000.

[47] "Grand Opening of the People's Theater," *RMNW*, 7 December 1861, 4. On "Professor" O. J. Goldrick, see Margaret McLean Truly, *In Defense of Professor Goldrick: Colorado's First Schoolteacher and Newspaper Reporter* (Vestavia Hills, AL: Summit Trail Booksmith, 2016).

of Denver's boosters, as well as their confidence in the coming prosperity prefigured by the theater, and encapsulated the civilizing process as it was translated into art, as well as the structure of the theater itself.

Because of the welcome reception received by Langrishe a year earlier, and now the investment in this property, his anticipated six-day layover in Denver became a decade-long residency. During that time, the "Father of Colorado Theater" attained political standing in the community, openly debated and advocated for a transcontinental railroad connection in Denver, and became the leading impresario in the American West. And while his own taste in entertainment favored comedy, melodrama, and farce, both serendipitous and engineered circumstances led to Langrishe becoming a presenter of opera in Denver.[48]

First Strains of Opera in Denver: The Gruenwalds at the Denver Theater, 1864

In early December 1864, Langrishe and his business partner Mike Dougherty were winding down a run of Lord Byron's pantomime *Don Juan* at the Denver Theater, formerly known as the Platte Valley Theater. This was the first structure in Denver built expressly as a theater, and welcomed an auspicious roster of traveling performers including Artemus Ward and P. T. Barnum before burning in 1873.[49] Located at what is now the northeast corner of Sixteenth and Lawrence Streets on the downtown mall, the Denver Theater was "a fairly creditable place of amusement for its time and circumstances," according to Jerome Smiley (see Figure 3).

[48] For documentary histories of Langrishe's time in Denver, see Alice Cochran, "Jack Langrishe and the Theater of the Mining Frontier" (master's thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1968), and Lauterbach and Lauterbach, *Comedian of the Frontier*, 61–108.

[49] Langrishe and Dougherty had successfully forced to close and purchased in 1862, the Denver Theater was then expanded after the fire and flood of 1863–1864; Smiley, *History of Denver*, 335. Details of Langrishe and Dougherty's purchase of the Platte Valley Theater for $2,500 appeared in *RMN*, 28 August 1862, 4.

Figure 3 View of 16th Street, Denver, Colorado, c. 1867. The Denver Theater is the building on the right, its name painted across the top. (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, X-23330.)

After its post-flood renovation and expansion, the Denver Theater seated fifteen-hundred patrons in four sections, accommodating up to thirty percent of the city's population of around five thousand in a single evening. It seems this theater segregated and ranked the audience by what they paid for admission, as opposed to earlier venues that offered general admission at a flat price.[50] Nevertheless, the new Denver Theater drew diverse audiences from across the city, as well as from neighboring mining towns including Cripple Creek, Black Hawk, and Central City, and seldom knew an evening of slim sales. Uniformed officers of the First Colorado Infantry escorted gaily dressed ladies to their seats in the dress circle, while polished-up smelters and foremen took their seats in the gallery. The opening of the Denver Theater was an event celebrated by the whole town: "The masses of all classes, so to speak, from the saloons of Blake

[50] Smiley, *History of Denver*, 906–907.

Street to the aristocracy-aping frames of Curtis and up-town-dom all were represented there last evening."[51] It was this space that would be the site of the first operatic performance in Denver.

As reported in the *News,* a Mr. and Mrs. Gruenwald, "first opera singers from the opera house of San Francisco," arrived in Denver on December 5, 1864, en route to Chicago and the eastern seaboard for a tour. Byers appealed to Langrishe and Dougherty, asking that they clear the boards of the theater to allow a performance by the Gruenwalds: "They must not leave without a hearing."[52] If the Gruenwalds performed, they would aid Denver's ongoing mission to have its citizenry versed and polished in the arts, and offer entertainment that was widely perceived as genteel and metropolitan. Although settlers were of many ethnic and social backgrounds and had different cultural interests, opera at the Denver Theater could perhaps prove to be a meeting ground of civility and socialization.

The Gruenwalds were not, in fact, the "first opera singers" at San Francisco. This accolade belonged to soprano Giovanna and tenor Eugenio Bianchi, who ruled that outpost of the Italian-language opera world during the 1850s and 1860s.[53] Perhaps because they could not compete with the Bianchis, the Gruenwalds decided to attempt a season of opera on the road. The present study addresses the Gruenwalds' transportation of cultural artifacts from one

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[51] *RMN*, 15 November 1864, 1; for a concise history of the Denver Theater under Langrishe's management, see Mary Cole Hollingsworth, "A History of the Theater of Denver, Colorado" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1932), 18–30.

[52] "THE OPERA—The celebrated Prima Donna Mrs. Gruenwald, accompanied by her husband, Mr. Gruenwald, first opera singers from the opera house of San Francisco, have arrived in Denver, en route for the States. We hope Langrishe & Dougherty will make some arrangement with them. The citizens of Denver would crowd the Theater to its utmost capacity to hear these first artists, as it would be a treat never before enjoyed in this city. The California and Salt Lake papers teem with notices in their praise. They must not leave without a hearing. Persons who have had the pleasure of hearing them in opera at New York, some seasons back, say they were appreciated with distinction in Maretzek's troupe." *RMN*, 5 December 1864, 3.

[53] As George Martin has shown in his work on the dissemination of Verdi's work to San Francisco, though the Bianchis were neither "famous or great" nor "destined to become so," they were nevertheless "much honored in the city but with reputations extending little beyond it." See George Martin, *Verdi at the Golden Gate: Opera and San Francisco in the Gold Rush Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 118–124.

recently established center of the urban frontier to another. Rather than focusing on the texts of the works they performed (which were not "works" in the traditional sense whatsoever), I am interested in the singers themselves, the institutions where they performed, and how personal opportunity helped them transfer opera as a cultural product to Denver.

The Gruenwalds tour was representative of a larger trend in American musical life. Unstable economies and financial calamity in Europe during the 1840s and 1850s contributed to a rapid increase in the United States of immigrant musicians, who were then largely responsible for disseminating works and entire repertoires. They were attracted by competitive incomes and eager audiences, as well as proximity to any number of growing markets in large and small towns. Many arrived by trans-Atlantic steamships in New York and helped enrich the musical culture of that city, though others did arrive at ports in California, New Orleans, Canada, or the southern United States. Furthermore, an ever-increasing number of vocal-star troupes and operatic concert companies travelled across the continent by means of the growing railroad system, and performed European works in the original language and an increasing number in English translations for both immigrant and multi-cultural communities. Praise for small troupes with large audiences at lyceums or theaters in the wilds of the American frontier demonstrates that opera was far from an elitist entertainment, and that it was highly portable. And the inclusion of European names on company rosters and playbills added an air of legitimacy to such troupes.[54] For Denver, the Gruenwalds' arrival promised not only something different (and for

[54] The multiplicity of Italian opera troupes and their wide-ranging itineraries in the United States and the American interior between 1848 and 1860 have been examined in Katherine K. Preston, *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825–60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 141–148. On the immigration of European musicians and the legitimacy they gave to a performance, see the collection of essays in John Graziano, ed., *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840–1900* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006).

some, familiar) in the way of entertainment, but also a sense of connection between the young city and larger cultural capitals where such musical treats were more common.

As no previous historical inquiry into their identities or itineraries exists, a study of the Gruenwalds' influence on the operatic culture of Denver must have its foundation in their earlier activities and examining how they became a part of the operatic marketplace. Born in Bavaria around 1826, Renzo Gruenwald first appeared in the San Francisco press during the summer of 1859, at which time he was listed as lessee and impresario of the American Theater. Though he acted from time to time, Renzo worked primarily as a theater manager while in San Francisco. Anna Stein Gruenwald, on the other hand, was a consummate performer and was routinely on stage. Born in Baden around 1836, Anna was a lyric coloratura, capable of the technical feats required by Donizetti and Bellini, and regarded also for her dancing. One ardent fan—Philo Jacoby, a writer, sharpshooter, and founder of the San Francisco Turnverein—wrote that her arrival breathed new life into the German-language spoken theater, which "gained in reputation and seems to be the assembling place of our so-called 'haut-monde.'" Her standing as an actor and singer was so significant and disruptive that she became the object of a press war with another troupe, during which her fans differentiated themselves as "Grünewaldians."[55] Anna's ability to draw around her the *haute monde* of San Francisco—the single western city with an operatic culture that Denver could emulate—points out the celebrity and authority of immigrant performers, even those far removed from east-coast centers.

The earliest identified performance by the Gruenwald duo occurred in November 1859 in Sacramento. Announcements for their "great attraction" of national songs in German and English

[55] Philo Jacoby, "Das deutsche Theater," *Californischer Staats-Kalender* (1868): 36; Jacoby translated and quoted in C. Grant Loomis, "The German Theater in San Francisco, 1861–1864," in *In Honorem Lawrence Marsden Price Contributions by His Colleagues and Former Students* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 195–196.

touted adoring audiences in New York, Philadelphia, Texas, and Mexico, also stating that they had recently completed their second successful season in San Francisco.[56] The burnish surrounding their performances may never be verified (and it seems in some cases to be confused in part with the biographies of the Bianchis), but by 1863, the Gruenwalds were prominent performers at variety theaters. Shortly after dancing the title role in Daniel Auber's *La muette de Portici* at Maguire's Opera House with the Bianchis singing Elvira and Masaniello, Anna headlined her own benefit concert as a vocal soloist. Given at the Metropolitan Theater on April 12, 1863, her program was described as a "Grand German Performance," though the papers did not identify her repertoire at the time. They did, however, mention that the Gruenwalds intended the concert to fund the costs of an eastern tour.

Even though they could not compete with the Bianchis on San Francisco's operatic stages, immigrant theater-goers had accepted the Gruenwalds and their benefit concert was successful. Initial attempts to chronicle their performances over the next fifteen months have been only partially successful. Nevertheless, when they arrived in Denver in December 1864, the Gruenwalds were equipped with a more robust repertory that included arias and operatic scenes (though no complete work, as doing so with two performers was not possible in places like Denver with few trained musicians) in addition to national songs in English and German, and an ever-improving reputation as first-rate "opera singers"—or at the very least, an improved capacity for promotion.

It appears the Gruenwalds arrived in Denver unannounced. Whether or not Langrishe and Dougherty planned beforehand to present the duo, there were two events that impelled their layover. First, as credited in the *News*, was an early December blizzard that had partially closed

[56] *Sacramento Daily Union*, 14 November 1859, 3.

eastward roads, making their journey through the territory more treacherous. More than likely, however, they were kept from traveling eastward on account of ongoing violence between white settlers and Plains Indians following the Sand Creek Massacre one week earlier. On November 29, 1864, more than seven hundred volunteers in the Third Colorado Calvary commanded by John Chivington ambushed a Cheyenne and Arapaho village at Sand Creek, a two-day coach ride southeast of Denver on the way to Kansas City. As the men were away from the camp hunting, most of the victims, between two and three hundred dead, were women and children. The subsequent backlash from the ambush halted any movement without armed escort through the Great Plains. Denver remained isolated for months as Plains warriors rallied against the atrocities of the massacre. The conflict devastated indigenous populations and polarized relations between their nations and white settlers.[57] It was at this inauspicious though decisive moment of violent colonization that opera entered Denver as a manifestation of Western culture.

Needless to say, the Gruenwalds were halted in their eastern trek. They agreed to the terms offered by Langrishe and Dougherty, who raised ticket prices from 75 cents to $1.50 for their two performances, "in consequence of the heavy expenses incurred to have them delay here."[58] The audience was reassured that the cost was "nothing under the circumstances of presenting an operatic treat."[59] Their first program was given on December 8, 1864. It included "numerous English ballads, and favorite gems, selections from the fashionable operas of Europe

[57] Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* (1961; repr., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013); Jerome A. Greene and Douglas D. Scott, *Finding Sand Creek: History, Archeology, and the 1864 Massacre Site* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 3–25; Peter Cozzens, *The Earth Is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016) 26–27, 472n12; Chip Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits: Inside the Fight to Reclaim Native America's Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 68–73.

[58] $1.50 for admission in 1864 would be equivalent to US$(2017)24.10; however, the fact that part of the audience likely paid in actual gold dust makes the relative value of the ticket more difficult to determine.

[59] *RMN*, 7 December 1864, 4.

and America." On a rough-hewn stage of only thirty square feet at the Denver Theater, Mrs. Gruenwald offered excerpts from *Norma* and *The Daughter of the Regiment*, including "Casta diva" and "Salut à la France."[60] Mr. Gruenwald's baritone voice joined her for scenes from Adrien Boieldieu's *Jean de Paris*, as well as a "comic duet in German," and selections from a work identified only as "*Romeo*."[61]

The following evening, December 9, the Gruenwalds pleased audiences with some lighter repertoire. They offered the "Marseillaise," "Then You'll Remember Me" from Michael William Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl* (1843), and an unidentified arrangement of "The Last Rose of Summer"—perhaps either John Andrew Stevenson's arrangement in Thomas Moore's *A Selection of Irish Melodies*, or even the romanza from Act II of Flotow's *Martha*. To add exotic color and contrast, Mrs. Gruenwald sang a Spanish song "in costume (not the song itself, but the singer)," and was joined by Mr. Gruenwald in a musical farce by Johann Nestroy and Adolf Müller. This piece, *Lumpacivagabundus* (1833), was first performed in America on New York City's Klein Deutschland stage in 1840. A *Zauberposse* (fairy-tale extravaganza), it required audiences to recognize musical quotations from German popular songs, and Italian, French, and

[60] The French was used for the aria's title while *La fille du régiment* was translated. It is unclear if the foreign-language arias were offered in the original language or English translation, though it seems likely that the anthems, folk songs, and ballads were sung in their original languages for the benefit of the city's cosmopolitan population.

[61] *RMN*, 8 December 1864, 4. This *Romeo* could have been Daniel Steibelt's (1793), Niccolò Zingarelli's (1795, brought to New York in 1826 by Manuel García's Italian Opera Company), Nicola Vaccai's (1825), or perhaps Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (1830, which was part of the Havana Opera Company's repertoire in New Orleans as early as 1837). Both Steibelt's and Bellini's works were both part of the concert and operatic repertoire enjoyed in New Orleans and San Francisco around the middle of the nineteenth century. Gounod's canonic setting was still three years from its premiere. In Steibelt's *Romeo et Juliette*, Romeo is cast as a tenor, and Juliet a soprano; in Bellini's, Romeo is typically a mezzo-soprano, a role written for Giuditta Grisi, and Juliet a soprano. John H. Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans: A Comprehensive Reference* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 269–302 passim; the repertoire of Manuel García's Italian Opera Company and Francesco Brichta's Havana Opera Company is given in Preston, *Opera on the Road*, 102–103, 114–115. On the operatic adaptations and traditions of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* up to and including Bellini, see Heather Hadlock, "On the Cusp Between Past and Future: The Mezzo-Soprano Romeo of Bellini's *I Capuleti*," *Opera Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (July 2001): 399–422.

German operatic arias in order to understand its furtive humor.[62] Denver's German immigrant population, roughly one-fifth of its total population at the time, were chief among the supporters of the Denver Theater, and regularly made, as Mildred MacArthur observed, "a fine show of public spirit in the advancement of philanthropic and educational projects."[63] They would have recognized familiar Volkslieder alongside pieces by W. A. Mozart and Franz Gläser, cultural fragments of their German-speaking heritage replicated in Denver. *Lumpacivagabundus*, as with other works in the *Posse* genre, was about representing the audience and their culture on stage, and doing so with familiar language, both musical and textual.[64]

Further eliminating the space between audience and stage, the Gruenwalds were joined in a scene from *The Daughter of the Regiment* by Langrishe and Dougherty's troupe and some of the town's musical residents.[65] Not only had the Gruenwalds delighted audiences with familiar popular songs from a variety of different cultural and national traditions, but now they were bringing the audience on the stage—making opera with the people. Except for Langrishe's wife, the local company was entirely male, and Anna Stein Gruenwald played the charming vivandière

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[62] John Koegel has provided an analysis of the musical quotations and chronicled the performance history of *Lumpacivagabundus*. See John Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater: New York City, 1840–1940* (Rochester, NY: University Rochester Press, 2009), 19–26; Koegel, "The Development of the German American Musical States in New York City, 1840–1890," in *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840–1900*, ed. John Graziano, 149–181.

[63] Mildred MacArthur, "History of the German Element in the State of Colorado" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1917), 13–14.

[64] As John Koegel has noted, the *Posse*—a comic burlesque genre that used magic along with musical and local farce to convey its humor—reached the apex of its development during the mid-nineteenth century in both Germany and the United States. Koegel translated and quoted Manfred Nöbel's description, stating that the *Posse* "is about the city in which it resides, the events and characters its brings on stage, the system of morals and virtues it represents, and the language it speaks;" quoted in Kogel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater*, 59. See also Nöbel's commentary on the German burlesque theaters operated by Count Franz Pocci, the preeminent impresario of *Posse* in Germany: "Neben äußeren Merkmalen, den musikalischen Einlagen, possenmäßigen Ansprachen an das Publikum und der lokalen Einbindung des Sujets, weisen seine Kasperlstücke in Struktur und Dramaturgie manche Ähnlichkeit mit den Spielvorlagen der zeitgenössischen Possentheater auf;" Manfred Nöbel, *Franz Pocci - Ein Klassiker und sein Theater* (Köln: Prometh Verlag, 1989), 59–61.

[65] *RMN*, 9 December 1864, 3.

Marie to the motley crew of immigrants, miners, and sourdoughs. Performing the opera was no longer about institutional authority; there was little fidelity to the voicing of Donizetti's score, and the composer and work had little to do with what was actually performed. Rather, the performance was of the people, where the agent was the audience, and the product a part of their participation. Certainly, the Denver Theater had become a place for instituting a system of values and morals, and the disciplined act of audience members performing alongside the Gruenwalds elevated this specific performance beyond the cacophony found at other venues.

Many of the specifics of the Gruenwalds' Denver performances and their reception will remain elusive. But their polyglot repertoire represented the musical traditions that frontier audiences knew and yearned for, taking them back to the entertainments they enjoyed in teeming east-coast and European cities. Over the two nights, the Gruenwalds offered songs in English and German alongside Italian, French, and German arias. They fostered accessibility in the performances, and educated the audience on their cultural heritage. In doing so, they helped establish the Denver Theater as the seedbed of culture in Denver, its legitimacy boosted by their appearance, further reflecting the growing affluence of the young metropolis.

Responses to the Gruenwalds, Editorial and Enacted

Music criticism played a role in developing opera connoisseurship among Denver audiences, inculcating readers in the history and aesthetics of legitimate theater. After their first performance, an unidentified writer for the *News* (likely Byers himself or possibly Goldrick) rebuked readers for not knowing enough to assess the quality of the Gruenwalds's performance. The critic's response suggests that the audience was overly congratulatory and boisterous, perhaps responding to the performance with the hoots and hollers that normally encouraged

Langrishe's troupe. But the reviewer considered that behavior disrespectful to opera and disruptive to the civilizing influence he expected it to have. Such preening of audiences was absolutely typical of critics' behavior all over the country during the nineteenth century, but this example seems to have been especially hard-hitting.

To remedy the lack of familiarity with the genre and its customs, the author provided a thousand-word article on the history of opera and the qualities required of "a good opera singer." After a brief précis on the origins of opera in Italy and France, the author argued that opera in Germany, England, and America had "degenerated to an order of entertainment in which the words are partly sung, partly spoken and partly slaughtered." In addition to the current poor quality of performance, which he felt included the Gruenwalds, the reviewer observed that audiences crowded into opera houses in America and Europe for the sole purpose of appearing fashionable. These were "the masses with less music in their souls than so many Sioux or Comanches." Comparing the culture and musical aptitude of white prospectors to indigenous peoples, especially where indigenous people are viewed more favorably than frontiersmen, was presumably intended to pressure some readers into more conscientious aesthetic engagement—if only to prove their ascendency within Denver society and to the outside world.

These perspectives were offered alongside recollections of hearing celebrated singers and visiting great opera houses—the reporter demonstrating his authority by exampling prior experience and knowledge in a review that is highly subjective, which he admits: "A drawing-room singer with an extra-fine natural soprano voice, such as that of a fair lady now in our mind's eye [Mrs. Gruenwald], may charm an audience with the 'Last Rose of Summer,' (which is only on eight notes,) while another's 'Star Spangled Banner,' (which extends to twelve,) would be considered common-place." The reviewer even wonders if there are not "some in

Colorado whose singing might sound sweeter" to local auditors, though they "mightn't be able scientifically to strike up a single note of music, as laid down upon the scale [read music notation]." It is evident, however, that the reception of the Gruenwalds was decidedly mixed:

> Many of [Mrs. Gruenwald's] auditors last evening expressed themselves decidedly disappointed in their expectations of her powers and accomplishments as a *prima donna*, or indeed a popular public balladist; and others there were that thought she was a very cultivated, correct and capital artiste. For our own part, we were not very much pleased with the soprano and baritone performances.[66]

With this introduction on opera in hand, readers were given an opportunity to develop critiques beyond those of passive spectators. Denver audiences were thus given the tools to become active respondents to opera. And while Mrs. Gruenwald's performance did not measure favorably against better-known performers recognizable to a few patrons—the author citing their own experience of hearing "[Teresa] Parodi, Rosalie Durand, Louisa Pyne, Little [Adelina] Patti and the charming Mrs. Strakosch [Amelia Patti]" years before in New Orleans—the performance did furnish "the greater portion of 'em [patrons] something harmless and tangible to talk about from then till Sunday."

This "word or two on the opera," as it was introduced, served as a primer on how someone could become an informed consumer of this newly available cultural product. By reading this review the next day, spectators would have another means of interacting with one who already knows and enjoys opera, learning how to better assess their experience. These examples of inculcation are classic incidences of affiliation and initiation as modeled by Howard Becker, and which have been more recently applied to opera spectatorship by sociologist Claudio

[66] *RMN*, 9 December 1864, 3; quoted in Henry Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness: A History of Music in Denver, 1860–1925* (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 2006), 192.

Benzecry.[67] The *News* article reads as an initiation into a cultural practice and an instructive tool for listeners to transform their experience. In this manner, readers would not only recognize their insufficient knowledge on the subject, but also desire to attain a heightened appreciation of opera and continue their patronage. Though the review was not particularly favorable toward the Gruenwalds, its author emphasized the value of opera and its reception in the theater culture of larger cities.

The next day, after their last performance in Denver, the reviewer for the *News* was upbraided for his comments by another author. Commending the Gruenwalds to audiences in Central City where they would go the following day, another unattributed review stated that they gave a "very good musical entertainment of the kind, no matter what scrub critics or conceited connoisseurs may tell you to the contrary."[68] Given the Gruenwalds' training, background, repertoire, and limited capacity with two performers, it seems unlikely that their intent was to give a performance that could reasonably be compared to those given by the biggest stars of the day. Instead, they presented operatic selections that were popular enough to be commercially successful, perhaps familiar to some in the audience, while patriotic songs and ballads appealed to all, including those who may not know already the plot of *Norma* or *The Daughter of the Regiment*. However, as suggested in their final Denver review, the critic's tepid response to the Gruenwalds was not because of their performance, but because the crowd was more interested in

[67] Howard S. Becker, "Becoming a Marihuana User," *American Journal of Sociology* 59 (1953): 235–242; Claudio E. Benzecry, "Becoming a Fan: On the Seductions of Opera," *Qualitative Sociology* 32, no. 2 (June 2009): 131–151; Benzecry, *The Opera Fanatic: Ethnography of an Obsession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[68] *RMN,* 10 December 1864, 3.

a lower order of theater—keeping Denverites from attaining the "innocent and salutary state of things" that legitimate theater could help them imitate.[69]

In the weeks following the Gruenwalds' performances in Denver, the town's citizens also began to take pleasure in and involve themselves in entertainments that undermined Byers and Langrishe's provisional support of legitimate theater. The theater boards returned from opera to a regular line-up of comedies and farces produced by Langrishe's troupe, as well as death-defying displays by traveling sword swallowers and stone eaters. But the immediacy of the Sand Creek Massacre continued to loom over the town and has immense implications for young Denver at this moment.

Langrishe's theater—and the town itself—became a stage for commemorating the mischaracterized "Battle of Sand Creek." Colonel Chivington and his ten companies returned from Sand Creek on December 13, 1864, welcomed with a triumphal march accompanied by bunting and a military band. Newspaper reports stated unequivocally that Chivington's battle was a victory against a greater foe, and the crowd cheered as soldiers lifted aloft the scalps of Arapaho and Cheyenne. War trophies were traded openly, leading the *News* to quip nonchalantly in response to a demand from Washington, DC, for an investigation: "Cheyenne scalps are getting as thick here now as toads in Egypt. Everybody has got one and is anxious to get another to send east."[70] During the federal inquiry the following spring, one witness testified that an intermission at the Denver Theater included a gruesome tableau, in which Arapaho and Cheyenne child captives were made hold up a rope to which scalps and other trophies were tied as the audience cheered. No corroborating reports have surfaced in the press for this specific

[69] "[Anna Stein Gruenwald's] vocalizings didn't suit the crowd, and the capacities of that crowd were not in affinity to her's." *RMN,* 10 December 1864, 3.

[70] *RMN,* 14 December 1864, 4.

event, but the incident has been relayed in many histories and speaks to the viciousness of Denver's barfly, vigilante mob.[71]

Two weeks later, around New Year's 1865, Langrishe and Dougherty presented a new play at the Denver Theater, "the great Indian drama of *Wept of the Wish-Ton-Wish*," adapted from James Fenimore Cooper's novel of the same title, which deals with miscegenation and the captivity of a Puritan daughter among Narragansett people, and questions whether or not peaceful coexistence between native nations and white settlers is possible.[72] Perhaps an implicit answer to that question was offered when the troupe used as stage properties "new and splendid Indian costumes, trophies taken in the big battle of Sand Creek," and ended the evening with a comic farce.[73] As eyewitnesses began to come forward with damning accounts against the "Bloodless Third" [Cavalry], and calls came for a congressional investigations into the atrocities against the Cheyenne and Arapaho, a variety troupe made up of the town's best-known performers presented a pantomimed reenactment, *The Battle of Sand Creek*, the first of many attempts to reconstitute the memory of Sand Creek as a victory of progress for white settlers.[74]

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[71] In part, descriptions of this "theatrical performance" seem to have originated with Simeon Whiteley, a Ute agent and translator, in his sworn eyewitness report given on 27 July 1865 in Denver: [W]hen the third Colorado regiment came back from Sand creek I saw in the hands of a good many of the privates a great many scalps, or parts of scalps, said to have been taken in that fight; at a theatrical performance held in this city [Denver] I saw a great many scalps exhibited; at various times in the city I must have seen as many as a hundred scalps." See "The Chivington Massacre," *Reports of the Joint Special Committees on the Condition of the Indian Tribes*, Senate Report 156, 39th Congress, 2nd session, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1867), 71. To name but a few works of theater history, Native American history, and U.S. history, this description has been repeated in Bruce McConachie, "American Theater in Context, 1600–1870," in *The Cambridge History of American Theater*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), I:171; William T. Hagan, *American Indians*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 86; Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History of the United States of America* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 62 and Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881), 347–348.

[72] On debates regarding the thematic elements of Cooper's original novel, see Robert Hardy, "Cooper's *The Wept of the Wish-Ton-Wish*," *Explicator* 51, no. 1 (1999): 14–15.

[73] *RMN*, 28 December 1864, 4.

[74] *RMN*, 4 January 1865, 3. Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 148–150.

These sensationalized spectacles and the operatic potpourri heard just weeks earlier occupied the same space, the Denver Theater, and were patronized as entertainment by many of the same people. Their proximity to one another serve as a reminder of the concurrent process of dispossession and subordination of native peoples, as well as the pursuit of a civilized reputation among Denver's citizens at any cost. To that end, as Creek-Cherokee scholar Tom Holm has noted, "Warfare has everything to do with social cohesion, and killing Indians was a powerful expression of American identity."[75] Repeating in theatrical performances this expression of settler-colonial identity made it even more powerful. Any advancement toward an "innocent and salutary state" afforded by the Gruenwalds arrival was replaced shortly thereafter by real and reenacted barbarism—a spectacle of callousness—and it would be five years before opera was heard again in one of Langrishe's theaters.

As early as 1864, enthusiasm for presenting and attending opera in Denver coincided with a period of rapid population growth and associated economic development. Denver offers a case study of the prestige economy around opera in nineteenth-century America. Operatic culture exemplified and signaled a city's status, and thus supporting opera was a social practice enjoyed in other capital cities that Denver's leaders were eager to imitate. A nexus in the American empire, Denver flourished out of the authority of the nation and its westward expansion; theater was nurtured in this instant city to transform, it was believed, the social habits of residents and further the civilizing mission of the polis. Theaters and their operatic performances helped shape the young city and cultivate respectability. Performers, including Jack Langrishe and his resident

[75] Tom Holm, "American Indian Warfare: The Cycles of Conflict and the Militarization of Native North America," in *A Companion to American Indian History*, ed. Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 170.

company and the itinerant Gruenwald operatic duo, introduced a standard of legitimate theater that other performers were expected to follow. Denverites' patronage of the theater was projected as one aspect of boosterism in the developing city; theatre was used to disprove assumptions that Denver was a place of outlaws and renegades, images that continue to dominate mythologies of the American West, and are problematized by acknowledging the existence of opera in Denver.

The first operatic performances in Denver featured favorite gems from the continental repertory sung alongside patriotic and regional songs in their original languages. Such potpourri performances fortified the notion of opera as popular entertainment that was neither elitist nor exclusive to wealthy patrons, as was the case across the United States. In fact, the inexpensive cost of tickets, which could be bought with either standard paper currency or precious bullion, indicate that the pioneer theater and its performances were fully integrated into the region's economy, being accessible to customers from miners to newspaper owners alike.

As Denverites pursued ideals of civilization, however, they simultaneously made the Denver Theater a contested space of decorum and barbarity. While opera had the potential to educate and socialize audiences, their contemporaneous patronage of low, circus-like entertainments and gruesome farces often recalls the settler-colonialist presence in the American West. The ongoing subjugation and destruction of indigenous peoples was dramatized and rehearsed and reenacted in the same theater as these first operatic entertainments. Though opera was not explicitly used in these grisly acts, the patrons and the performance space remained largely the same. The Gruenwalds' operatic performance in Denver, their proximity to the hostilities at Sand Creek, and the reenactment of the massacre on the stage of the Denver Theater beg a decolonized reading of opera and theatrical customs in settler-colonial societies.

The Civil War largely sidetracked westward expansion, while isolation, lack of material comforts, and the difficulty of making a profit prospecting made "go backs" of many. Even William Larimer, the town father who had once claimed "I am Denver City," returned east when his investments in real estate dried up. Over the course of the war, Colorado Territory's total population dropped from 34,277 to 27,931. By 1870, the census revealed that only ten percent of Denver's current population of 4,759 had resided in the city for five or more years.[76] This decline in population did not help Colorado promoters petition for statehood in the 1860s; four times their efforts were unsuccessful.[77] Equally disappointing was the fact that the Union Pacific's federal construction subsidy for the transcontinental railroad was based on mileage completed. Building through the Rockies was slow and expensive, so Denver lost its 1867 bid to host the transcontinental junction to Cheyenne.[78]

On account of the financial hardships caused by the American Civil War and challenges met by theater companies while venturing into the frontier, the continuation of this operatic culture was largely halted for the next five years. Though audience size and the number of spoken theater genres offered in Denver continued to increase over the next decade, opera was not part of this development. The eventual return of opera was aided by the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869, when a golden spike closed the distance between the Atlantic and Pacific at Promontory Summit, Utah Territory. This afforded cities along the way an

[76] Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, Thomas J. Noel, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, 5th ed. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2013), 63–67. Hereafter cited as *CHCS*.

[77] A statehood attempt in 1864 was defeated by Hispanic citizens in the southern counties and residents of Golden who were distrustful of Denverites; an 1865 attempt was opposed by President Andrew Johnson, along with one hundred and thirty-seven disenfranchised African Americans who petitioned Congress to deny statehood until "the word white be erased from the State Constitution"; and Johnson blocked two other attempts on account of the state's small population and the threat of two Republican senators entering the already sharply opposed legislature. See "Statehood" in *CHCS*, 69–72.

[78] *CHCS*, 72–73.

opportunity to tie into an expanding continental economy and international operatic market. Just months after the railroad was completed, traveling opera companies again included Denver on their itineraries.

Boosters continued to advocate for the territory and city on all fronts. The 106-mile Denver Pacific connection with the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1870, and the effect was almost immediate. A private census conducted in July 1872 reported Denver's population at 10,822, more than double two years earlier.[79] At the same time, Denver was becoming a tourist destination. One booster wrote of how welcoming the city was to travelers after a long journey across the plains—that there was a "dash and animation to the place, along with a finish and elegance that suggests prosperity, wealth, and Eastern stability, as well as the progressive and aggressive frontier."[80] Denver was growing again, and an important part of its post-bellum economy was entertainment.[81]

[79] Elmer O. Davis, *The First Five Years of the Railroad Era in Colorado: June 19, 1867 to June 19, 1872, Julesburg to Pueblo in Five Years* (Golden, CO: Sage Books, 1948), 194.

[80] Frank Fossett, *Colorado: Its Gold and Silver Mines, Farms and Stock Ranges, and Health and Pleasure Resorts* (New York: C. G. Crawford, 1879), 33. On the post-bellum rebound of Denver's economy, see also Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Rise of the Centennial State: Colorado Territory, 1861–76* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 59–80.

[81] For information on post-Civil War social and infrastructure changes and the impact they had on performers and entertainment, see Katherine K. Preston, *Opera for the People: English-Language Opera and Women Managers in Late 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 36–43.

CHAPTER TWO

Defining Opera in the American West: Operatic Companies and Spaces in Denver, 1864–1881

On the morning of March 5, 1878, the *Rocky Mountain News* exuberantly reported on the opening of a new opera house, the finest in the whole region: "When she [the city] wants anything she buys it or builds it, and when the need of an opera house was fully realized, no time was wasted in talking about the great need of a fitting temple for the musical muses and in waiting for somebody to come along and build it." Unfortunately for Denverites, the freshly christened opera house being extolled was not their own, but that of Central City, a small albeit fantastically wealthy gold mining hamlet forty miles west of Denver. The press delighted in their sister city's acquisition of such a fine structure, though they also took every opportunity to point out the obvious absence of such a building in their own city. Every detail of the new opera house was reported with a whiff of covetousness for Central City's accomplishment: how a group of amusement-loving citizens had united funds by selling $50,000 in stock, the quality of donated materials used by local craftsmen to build it, the talent of the local musicians who christened the theater, the spaciousness of the stage, and the "neat not gaudy" decoration of the auditorium. The orchestra pit, which was lower than the main floor of the auditorium, was especially praised because, per the *News*, "the 'big fiddle' and its engineer do not loom up above everything else in the building, as in our alleged Denver opera house."[1]

[1] *RMN*, 5 March 1878, 4. The relative value of US$(1878)50,000 is US$(2017)1.27 million. In 1878, with a population around 2,500, Central City was known as "the richest square mile on earth." In 2019, with a town population of 733, the opera house is still in use during the summer as the home of Central City Opera.

The writer's frustration with the lack of an opera house in the Queen City was palpable. Central City's good news came directly in the middle of Denver's own years-long battle over funding, building, and managing a similar structure. It was a debate that divided city officials and promoters, pitted the press against prospective impresarios, and left some touring opera troupes—most of which would never again attempt a tour of the Rockies—performing in less than ideal circumstances. This chapter covers operatic activity in Denver between 1864 and 1881, a period of fits and starts to cultivate an opera market, build a suitable structure, and attract the skilled personnel needed to sustain its output. This period reveals a sizable operatic culture and engaged audience base among Denverites, who were neither passive nor unswervingly ebullient with their appraisals of opera performances, as well as the fact that only private subsidy could support regular performances of opera in the American West.

How opera was presented and what qualified as opera in the mind of theater managers and patrons is also examined. The use of "opera" in the nineteenth-century American West was imprecise and often unclear not only to audiences, but also to cultural historians who have studied entertainment in the frontier. Although miners and land speculators were eager to practice taxonomy when it came to valuable mineral deposits, there was little interest in drawing hard and fast distinctions between the Gruenwalds' performance of a German *Zauberposse* versus scenes from a Donizetti *opéra comique*. Opera, as Tim Carter has observed, is a terminological minefield, having a "complex intermingling of space, agency, and outcome embedded within the term."[2]To that end, "opera" was applied to musical companies, their performances, and the buildings that housed them because of its power of legitimacy.

[2] Tim Carter, "What is Opera?," in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. Helen M. Greenwald (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17–18.

During the nineteenth century, especially during the post-Civil War era and into the turn of the century, OPERA was chiseled into architecturally dramatic pediments and lintels across America not because that was the principal entertainment given there, but on account of the authority and prestige the term wielded for a city and its power brokers. Sometimes these structures were produced through the joint effort of local stockholders, as in Central City; the majority of them, however, resulted from the munificence of industrial barons turned private benefactors, such as Horace Tabor and his Grand Opera House examined in chapter three. Either way, they sprang up in the West at a rate of almost one per city with a population of over two thousand.[3] When they were built, they hosted performances, political debates, worship services, lectures, living museums, and displays of new technologies. They were ecosystems of civic life and sociability.

This chapter explores two primary questions: What did opera mean to Denverites? And how did it exist in their city at all? Opera was a capacious term for audiences, representing a diverse repertory of different languages, moral parameters, and necessities for production. At the Denver Theater, itinerant companies who presented opera included the Howson Opera, Burlesque, and Comedy Troupe in 1869, followed by Marie Aimée's French opera bouffe troupe in 1872. Both specialized in the works of Jacques Offenbach, the first in English translation and the other in French, headlined by sopranos who helped popularize comic opera in the American West. Enthusiasm for Offenbach and opera bouffe prepared the way for the buoyant and similarly feverish arrival of Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S Pinafore* in 1878, which became a staple of amateur operatic organizations, as examined in chapter four. The Howsons and Aimée

[3] As of 2018, there are still between seventeen and twenty buildings in small mountain towns across Colorado that have the words "Opera House" above their doors; of these, seven are still actively used for performances, hosting local theater productions and some of the finest music festivals and summer opera festivals in the country.

were followed by Alice Oates and Caroline Richings, whose companies presented some of the same repertory exclusively in English, but were dreadfully encumbered in their reception by want of a legitimate opera house. It is the acute need for a performance place and philanthropy that led to recurring problems with productions and attendance, and even outright public embarrassment for performers and managers.

The Post-Bellum Return of Opera to Denver:
Emma and Clelia Howson and English-Language Opera Bouffe

Jacques Offenbach's operas flourished in America as soon as their dissemination across the Atlantic began. In September 1867, audiences responded with resounding approval when manager Henry L. Bateman brought the French soprano Lucille Tostée to New York for a run of *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* at the Théâtre Français. Admired for its satirizing of militarism and high society, Bateman's first run of *La Grande-Duchesse* lasted an astonishing six months, drawing patrons away from the well-established Italian opera season managed by Max Maretzek at the Academy of Music, and began what chronicler George Odell called an "opéra-bouffe fever."[4] Exquisite costumes, imported scenery, pantomimed comedy, an abundance of Offenbach's memorable melodies, and admission prices that were accessible to working- and middle-class audiences made *La Grande-Duchesse* an instant hit. Even if the French-language libretto was not readily understood by everyone, the effervescent music and audiences' opportunity for public prurience helped launch a golden era for opera bouffe in America.[5]

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[4] George Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, vol. 8 (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 296; quoted in Preston, *Opera for the People*, 43.

[5] On the premiere performances and reception of Offenbach's *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* and other *opéras bouffes* in New York, see James Morgan, "French Comic Opera in New York, 1855–1890" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1959); Deane L. Root, *American Popular Stage Music, 1860–1880* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1981), 115–119; Gerald Bordman, *American Operetta: From H.M.S. Pinafore to Sweeney Todd* (New York: Oxford

La Grande-Duchesse quickly entered the realm of American popular music, aided not only by Offenbach's pleasing music and the fashionableness of all things French, but also the wellspring of juvenile adaptations, sheet music collections, and English translations it prompted.[6]

Though performances in the original language initiated American enthusiasm for opera bouffe, the works of Offenbach, Edmond Audran, Charles Lecocq, Florimond Ronger (*dit* Hervé), and Robert Planquette were all subject to translation and adaption into English and other languages, which helped to spread opera bouffe and increase its appeal to a wider audience. Highlighting the versatility of itinerant opera companies, those who performed opera bouffe in the vernacular routinely alternated these performances with English comic operas and the rare American musical comedy, as well as English translations of continental works. Although by the late 1870s it was quite common to hear opera bouffe in English, even outside of New York and francophone New Orleans there were debates about the legitimacy of opera bouffe sung in French or a translation, not to mention a moral concern with their unscrupulous messages. No matter how faithful to the original an English adaptation remained, there were always detractors suggesting that the comedy was lost in translation and the work's integrity was adversely affected. Opera bouffe's slippage toward burlesque was never far off.[7]

University Press, 1981), 10–11; Laurence Senelick, *Jacques Offenbach and the Making of Modern Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 123–125; and Preston, *Opera for the People*, 43–44.

[6] Root, *American Popular Stage Music*, 115–117.

[7] On the cool response of some critics to English-language performance of opera bouffe, see the discussion in Morgan, "French Comic Opera in New York," 105–108; and Gerald Bordman, "Scene One: Opéra Bouffe and Native Elements, 1866–1878," in *American Musical Theater: A Chronicle*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 22–23. Reception in New Orleans is noteworthy because of the city's syncretic French operatic culture dating from 1796; on the French opera in New Orleans, see Henry K. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791–1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966); Dale Cockrell, "Nineteenth-Century Popular Music," *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 162–163; Grove Music Online, s.v. "New Orleans (opera)," by Jack Belsom, https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O006981; and Charlotte Bentley, "The Race for *Robert* and Other Rivalries: Negotiating the Local and (Inter)National in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 29, no. 1 (March 2017): 94–112.

Some critics of opera bouffe balked at the raciness of their libretti, which were littered with double-entendres, and choreographed dances that inevitably required the uncovering of ankles. Another worry was that the music of Offenbach and his compatriots would result in lower standards of American musical taste. Nevertheless, their performance provided a cathartic retreat for a war-weary American public. Coming in the wake of the Civil War, the craze for opera bouffe displaced the sentimentality and transcendentalism of the pre-war period and replaced it, as Laurence Senelick has suggested, with apathetic materialism.[8] In advertisements, "French," "Offenbach," "burlesque," and "leg show" were used interchangeably as shorthand, veiled invitations for audiences to enjoy voyeuristic delights in the genteel space of an opera house. Offenbach and his works, as Max Maretzek put it, overthrew audiences' developing appreciation of Italian *bel canto* repertory, and "swept the love for legitimate opera away like a tidal wave."[9] Despite critics' moralistic distaste for opera bouffe, throngs of patrons across the United States and its territories found pleasure in the musical, satirical, and sensual aspects of Offenbach's works. In Denver, a single family—the Howsons—was responsible for the watershed introduction of his sparkling opera bouffe repertory.

Like the Gruenwalds, members of the immigrant Howson family first made their mark on American operatic culture in San Francisco, and sought to continue building their reputation with a tour that included Denver. The Howson Opera Troupe arrived in San Francisco from Sydney

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[8] Senelick, *Jacques Offenbach and the Making of Modern Culture*, 130–135.

[9] On the critical responses to light opera and operetta, see Preston, *Opera for the People*, 212–214. Quoted in Max Maretzek, *Further Revelations of an Opera Manager in 19th Century America*, ed. and annotated Ruth Henderson (Sterling Heights, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2006), 102. From his arrival in New York City in 1848, Max Maretzek made his impresario career in the United States and Latin America primarily by presenting Italian-language troupes.

on June 23, 1866.[10] Frank Howson (1817–1869) led the company, accompanied by his daughters Emma (1844–1928) and Sarah Clelia (1845–1931), and son Frank A. Jr. (1841–1926), as well as other family members. Frank Howson began his career as an impresario in Hobart, Tasmania in 1842. He was recruited from London by Tasmanian officials to offer settlers legitimate theater and, it was hoped, to improve the reputation of the fledgling penal colony into a "little England."[11] Howson collaborated in this endeavor with the English-Australian mezzo-soprano Marie Carandini, known as "the Tasmanian nightingale," who specialized in *bel canto* works. He capitalized on Carandini's and his own connections to Michael William Balfe, Edward Loder, and John Barnett in order to access new English-language repertory.[12]

Throughout their time in Australia and America, the Howson troupe performed an array of spoken melodramas, pantomimes, concerts, and both opera bouffes and continental operas in English translations. As Australian cultural historian Nicole Anae has suggested, this hybridity of entertainment allowed the Howsons to "offer 'popular' theater without necessarily compromising on their appeal as a more classically oriented troupe."[13] Their strategy for presenting opera in the American West followed much the same model: perform opera bouffes in English alongside

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[10] For the full report on the arrival of the Howsons in the United States, see San Francisco's *Daily Dramatic Chronicle* [hereafter *DDC*], 25 June 1866, 3.

[11] On the work of Frank Howson and his family in Tasmania, see Nicole Anae, "'The New Prima Donnas': 'Homegrown' Tasmanian 'Stars' of the 1860s Emma and Clelia Howson," *Journal of Australian Studies* 28, no. 84 (January 2005): 173–181.

[12] Frank Howson's older sister Emma Albertazzi (née Howson; 1814–1847) was a favorite contralto on the London stages during the 1830s and 1840s. Balfe composed for her the role of Annette Page in *Falstaff* (1838), a tremendous opportunity to join a star-studded cast that included the famed *I Puritani* quartet of Grisi (Mrs. Ford; also her teacher), Rubini (Fenton), Tamburini (Ford), and Lablache (Sir John Falstaff). See the *dramatis personae* in Manfredo Maggioni and M. W. Balfe, *Falstaff. Libretto. English & Italian* (London: Brettell, Rupert Street, Haymarket, 1838).

[13] Anae, "The New Prima Donnas," 176–177; see also Veronica Kelly, "Hybridity and Performance in Colonial Australian Theater: The Currency Lass," in *(Post)Colonial Stages; Critical and Creative Views on Drama, Theater & Performance*, ed. Helen Gilbert (West Yorkshire: Dangaroo Press, 1999), 40–54.

farces and parodies of grand operas. In an expanding market of opera singers and companies, this assorted repertory meant that the Howson troupe would almost always be able to fill the boards with something that drew interest. Though they would attempt to present larger works, their most significant contributions were made in disseminating French works in English translations in both the Australian and American frontiers. Frank Howson's success as impresario of the family troupe earned him recognition as "the pioneer of opera in Australia," and both Emma and Clelia, the two eldest Howson children born in Tasmania, maintained a degree of celebrity in their homeland even as they became famous abroad.

Figure 4 Emma and Clelia Howson in Hobart, c. 1862. (State Library of New South Wales, Cartes-de-visite, PXA 362/Vol.6/p.7.)

The American careers of Emma and Clelia Howson began on July 9, 1866, in San Francisco. The troupe leased the Academy of Music from Thomas Maguire, performing for its first three evenings *La Sonnambula* in English. Emma sang Amina and Clelia the role of Lisa. The newly arrived troupe drew a crowded house, but not one that was overly impressed by their performance. The singers all suffered from "bad colds" and begged the audience's forgiveness. Nevertheless, though Emma's voice was "clear and flute-like," it was deemed "deficient" all the same, and younger Clelia was appraised more as actress than a singer. Those who anticipated hearing the Bellini performed by an "old and experienced company" were disappointed. Although the reviewer did look forward to their performance of English opera, he credited the Howsons as a "nice little 'drawing room opera troupe'—nothing more."[14]

Rumors circulated shortly thereafter that the Howsons would perform more operas in Italian. Such a season of Italian opera, however, was impermissible; the press sternly warned them that though a season of English opera would be well patronized, "an attempt to produce Italian opera with English artists would prove a dangerous experiment."[15] On the fourth and fifth nights the house was closed, presumably for some mixture of convalescence and preparing the demanded works. They offered Vincent Wallace's *Maritana* (1845), which, in a pleasant turn of fortune, was favorably received as their "signature work." *Maritana* ran for three nights before they attempted Gounod's *Faust* in English, a performance that one reviewer disapprovingly called their failed "Niagara Leap" to larger works.[16] Evidently it was permissible for the

[14] *DDC*, 10 July 1866, 3.

[15] *DDC*, 7 July 1866, 3.

[16] *DDC*, 7 July 1866, 3. This performance was likely given in the English translation by Henry Chorley, which was first performed in London in 1863, and was published in the United Kingdom by Boosey and in Boston by Oliver Ditson.

"drawing room opera troupe" to offer operas from the English tradition, but venturing into a repertory of continental operas in a city with allegiances to foreign-language companies was not advisable.[17] Perhaps it was best, then, that but a small audience witnessed the "abortive attempt" at their translated *Faust* before returning to lighter repertory.[18] The Howsons concluded their first season in San Francisco in mid-July with *The Bohemian Girl* and Edward Loder's *The Night Dancers* (1846).[19] The Howson family then made a sketchily documented tour of the Pacific Coast before returning to San Francisco in early autumn.

Upon their return, it was publicized that "Signor [Eugenio] Bianchi has pleasure in announcing the engagement of [the Howson English Opera Troupe], who will commence their engagement in [the Metropolitan Theater]. And will perform in **English Opera** [emphasis original] on alternate nights with the Italian opera."[20] Under the auspices of the Bianchis—who specialized almost exclusively in performing *bel canto* and Verdi opera, with the addition that season of Halévy's *La Juive* (in Italian)—the Howsons now enjoyed front-page paid advertising, whereas they had none during the July engagement. They offered, as before, *The Bohemian Girl* and *Maritana*, and added *Der Freischütz; Or, the Seven Magic Bullets*, *Fra Diavolo*, and Barnett's *The Mountain Sylph*, all in English. They also advertised a new production of Rossini's *Cinderella*, though it does not seem this was actually produced during their season with the Bianchis. It is noteworthy that, aside from their failed performances of *La Sonnambula* and the

[17] English-language opera was produced in San Francisco, though not with the same regularity as Italian opera, leading one critic to note San Franciscan's "preference which has on all occasions been manifested for the Italian over the English opera;" see "Italian vs. English Opera," *Daily Alta California*, 3 December 1860, 2; as well as George Martin's discussion of English-language opera in San Francisco, *Verdi at the Golden Gate*, 196–198.

[18] *DDC*, 19 July 1866, 3.

[19] *DDC*, 27 July 1866, 3.

[20] *DDC*, 27 September 1866, 1.

speculative performances of *Cinderella*, the Howsons continued to perform everything but Italian works in translation or otherwise. This was owing to the Bianchis' jurisdiction over that repertory, which was policed by their favorability with the press. Nevertheless, the press had come around to rather appreciating the variety the Howsons added to the operatic boards: "Those who only heard this troupe at the Academy of Music, when they were—although suffering from severe colds and entirely unable to sing—forced on the stage to 'run an opposition' to the Italian Opera, will be surprised at the wonderful improvement which has taken place in the singing of these artists."[21]

Following the close of their season, a benefit for Emma and Clelia was advertised. It drew a predictably "large and fashionable audience" following the success of sharing the boards with the Bianchis. On the concert, Emma Howson surprised the audience "by the admirable manner in which she acquitted herself on her first appearance in Italian opera in San Francisco." This was a performance—this time sung in Italian—of Leonora in the first, fourth, and fifth acts

[21] *DDC*, 9 October 1866, 3. The two companies shared the stage, scenery, and orchestra of the Metropolitan. They did not, however, share a pricing structure for tickets, suggesting that either English-language opera, the Howsons, or both were initially less valued than their Italian counterparts. The Bianchis maintained normal ticket prices; single seats in the dress circle, orchestra, or parquette going for one dollar (with the option of reserving seats for an additional 50 cents), and 50 cents for seats in the gallery. Howsons' English opera, on the other hand, advertised a greater variety of pricing options; one dollar for the dress circle only, parquette seats for 50 cents, and gallery seats for 25 cents. While the difference in ticket prices for the two troupes could certainly reflect the higher costs of presenting stars like the Bianchis, it also suggests—especially when taken with the editorial promises to Howson that his troupe would fail attempting Italian-language opera—that English-language and Italian-language performances were not always attended by the same audiences. It seems likely, in fact, that the Metropolitan's managers presented the two companies concurrently in order to earn more revenue from more segments of the San Francisco society. In San Francisco as elsewhere, there were two emergent opera-going populations; one that supported foreign-language opera, and that which preferred English-language opera. As Katherine Preston has argued, after the Civil War "American moneyed classes ("society") expanded with the addition of entrepreneurs, bankers, and captains of industry. . . . This meant that wealthy Americans (especially New Yorkers) who for decades had been trying to make foreign-language opera-going into an exclusive and expensive style of entertainment now had the requisite numbers to do so;" Preston, *Opera for the People*, 2–3. Ticket prices as given in recurring front-page advertisements; see, *DDC*, 27 September 1866, 1. A $1 ticket in 1866 would be equivalent to US$(2017)15.90. Gallery seats at 25 cents were the lowest admission price yet charge for opera in San Francisco; see Martin, *Verdi at the Golden Gate*, 123. The Italian- and English-language troupes continued to alternate their performances for two weeks, and the works seen at the Metropolitan finally appealed to those "people who love fine music who are brave enough to confess that they prefer English opera to Italian," further supporting the notion that there were emerging two distinct groups of operagoers; *DDC*, 25 July 1866, 3.

of *Il Trovatore*, with Giovanna Bianchi singing Azucena, Eugenio Bianchi as Maurice, and Frank Howson as Conte di Luna. It was deemed on the whole a "series of triumphs for the members of the Howson troupe." At the end of the performance, Clelia stepped before the Metropolitan's green curtain and delivered "one of the prettiest little speeches ever delivered on the San Francisco stage" on behalf of the troupe, saying that though they were under a cloud when they first arrived "there was light breaking through the cloud (meaning the silver lining)."[22] This was on October 24, and on October 26, Frank Howson was listed as the general manager of the Metropolitan Theater in a front-page advertisement for the Howsons' very own production of *Cinderella*.[23]

San Francisco remained the Howsons' home base through early 1869, though family members often worked on projects independent of one another. Despite Frank's efforts, they never again attained the level of support they had during that first season running opposition to the Bianchis, nor did they ever collaborate again with the Italian company. In July 1868, it was reported that Emma and Clelia were discussing with John Piper (owner of opera houses in Virginia City and Carson City, Nevada) the prospect of "making arrangements . . . To come over and delight the population thereabouts with some of their delightful operas."[24] A poorly attended benefit was tendered for the sisters on February 3, 1869, at which time it was announced that the family—though they could give "entertainments in any city of the United States with the

[22] *DDC*, 25 October 1866, 3.

[23] *DDC*, 26 October 1866, 1.

[24] *DDC*, 18 July 1868, 3; on Piper's Opera House in Virginia City, see Jacquelyn Sundstrand and Jessica Maddox, "A Guide to the Playbills and Tickets of Piper's Opera House," July 12, 2016 http://dewey.library.unr.edu/xtf/view?docId=ead/91-33-ead.xml.

certainty of handsome remuneration"—proposed a tour of Japan and China.[25] But they headed east instead. After performing at Piper's Nevada opera houses, they made their way to Salt Lake City, and eventually Denver. Shortly after their arrival they formed a combination company with Jack Langrishe's dramatic troupe. As the Gruenwalds had five years before, the Howsons continued on to Central City, a route for performers that was taken regularly enough that it eventually earned the name the "silver circuit."[26] The Howsons brought their experience and knowledge of this novel repertory, a few necessary props and costumes, and sets of orchestra parts to places too remote for most troupes to visit, including cities that lacked the proper facilities or even partial orchestras. In 1869, Denver was still one of these lackluster stops for the Howsons, but a vital one to their tour nonetheless.

Langrishe engaged the Howson troupe to perform at the Denver Theater between June 26 and July 2, 1869.[27] The *News* announced that the company would commence their season with Offenbach's "famed opera bouffe" *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* in English, the first complete opera to be seen in Denver.[28] Correspondence received from Salt Lake City a few days before promised that, while the Howsons would produce opera bouffe to the pleasure of the audience, their repertory was not "the most capacious" as they did not "attempt the tragic at all."

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[25] The tour and benefit (postponed from January 28 on account of weather) were initially announced in the *Daily Alta California*, 19 January 1869, 1; a review and program of the benefit, at which Clelia "presided at the piano with skill and good taste" appeared in the *Daily Alta California*, 4 February 1869, 1.

[26] Detail of the Howson family's tour with Langrishe's troupe to Central City are given in Schoberlin, *From Candles to Footlights*, 189–190, 286n8; as well as Lauterbach and Lauterbach, *Comedian of the Frontier*, 108. The "silver circuit" and its management are discussed in chapter three.

[27] The Howsons arrived in Denver on 24 June 1868, having occupied six seats on the Wells, Fargo, & Co. Line from Cheyenne; *RMN*, "Arrivals," 25 June 1869, 4. Linscome briefly describes their activity in Denver (though he misattributes them as the Hawson [*sic*] Opera Troupe; see Linscome, "History of Musical Development in Denver," 191–192, 194. Miles, likewise, briefly mentions the Howsons in Denver, though he does not completely describe their repertory nor discuss their reception; see Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 192.

[28] *RMN*, 25 June 1869, 4. The title was initially given in French, though after the first three days of advertising it was listed merely as *The Grand Duchess*.

Nevertheless, Byers remarked that the opera provided "a pleasant change from the old drama so long our only amusement" and would be welcomed with full houses.[29]

Langrishe evidently chose not to advertise for the Howsons nor for any of his productions that season in the Denver newspapers, though he did place a nearly full column advertisement in two issues of Golden City's weekly *Colorado Transcript* on June 23 and 30 (see Figure 5). The lack of published advertising in Denver indicates that the Howson performances were hawked by flyers and word of mouth, and with apparent success: the *News* found it "not necessary to urge a full house, as all the seats are already taken, and many engaged for [the second performance]."[30] While the lack of advertising boded well for Langrishe and the Howsons, it is disadvantageous to the historian because we cannot otherwise know the value of tickets to their performances in Denver, nor compare them to the price of tickets for Langrishe's spoken theater. It can be said, however, that admission to the Howsons' performances at Piper's theater in Canyon City in May were $1 per seat regardless of position or advanced reservation, which was consistent with the price for the best seats to their earlier performances in San Francisco.[31] Perhaps this consistency in pricing followed the Howsons to their performances in Denver.

Just five months after its American premiere in New York, the Howson troupe first introduced *La Grande-Duchesse* to western audiences by way of an English translation in San Francisco on February 13, 1868. Performances were given every day but Sunday for two weeks at the Temple of Music, immediately after which Emilie Melville took up a new production at

[29] *RMN*, 23 June 1869, 2l; *RMN*, 22 June 1869, 4.

[30] *RMN*, 25 June 1869, 4.

[31] *Carson Daily Appeal*, 8 May 1869, 2.

the Metropolitan Theater with part of the Howson family.[32] The next year, during their tour that included Denver, the Howsons performed the work in Salt Lake City, "which the Prophet and President, Brigham Young, witnessed on three consecutive nights."[33]

DENVER

THEATRE.

Mr. Langrishe

Begs to announce that he has effected an engagement for

Six Nights Only!

with the celebrated

HOWSON

OPERA, BURLESQUE,

and

Comedy Company.

commencing

Saturday Evening,

June 26, 1869.

MISS EMMA HOWSON,
The great Prima Donna

MISS CLELIA HOWSON,
The Fascinating Soubrette.

MR. FRANK HOWSON,

MR. JOHN JEROME,

MR. F. A. HOWSON,

and numerous auxilliaries.

Figure 5 Advertisement for the Howson Opera, Burlesque, and Comedy Company. (Golden City's *Colorado Transcript*, 23 June 1869, 2.)

[32] On March 5 both troupes performed the work simultaneously. See front page advertisements and reviews of both runs in *DDC*, 13 February–6 March 1868.

[33] Charles Eyre Pascoe, *The Dramatic List: A Record of the Principal Performances of Living Actors and Actresses of the British Stage*, 2nd ed. (London: David Bogue, 1880), 189; Julius Mattfeld, *Variety Music Cavalcade 1620–1961* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1952), 133; Deane Root credits this as "the first operatic work ever produced in Salt Lake City (1 June 1869)"; see, *American Popular Stage Music*, 117.

La Grande-Duchesse was indeed a new type of entertainment for Denver audiences when it opened on Saturday, June 26, and marked the beginning of the city's enthusiasm for opera bouffe. For this performance at the Denver Theater, Emma played the Duchess, Clelia was Wanda, F. A. Howson appeared as Prince Paul, John Jerome (Howson, who went by his given names in advertisements) was General Boum, and Frank Howson played Fritz; they were joined by Langrishe as Baron Puck, Jimmy Griffith as Baron Grog, and were lent the tenor L. M. Browne as Nepomuc, all members of Langrishe's troupe. Any ensuing criticism was, as Byers put it, "not exactly within the powers" of the local press—a very different story than the "word or two" received by the Gruenwalds. Nevertheless, the audiences hailed the performance as a "grand success, a fact which is more than endorsed by the frequent encores and enthusiastic applause which greeted the various performances of the troupe." The "Misses Howson" were charming and ranked high "as accomplished artistes."[34]

On Monday, June 28 the Howson men and Clelia sang about Bayonne ham and sardines in Offenbach's "bouffonnerie musicale" *Tromb-al-ca-zar*, introducing Denver audiences by way of parody to works by Félicien David, Daniel Auber, and Adolphe Adam.[35] Emma and Clelia followed with a concert of operatic selections; though their repertory was not listed, they earned exuberant though not acutely insightful praise: "no finer or more cultivated voices have ever been heard in Denver." The following evening, they performed the farce *Perfection, or the Maid of Munster*, during which the sisters interpolated songs by Edmund Harper, Lewis Lavenu, and various other balladists. The Howsons then concluded the evening with a work that had been a

[34] *RMN*, 27 June 1869, 4.

[35] On *Tromb-al-ca-zar*, an operatic parody in one act by Offenbach, see Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Operetta: A Sourcebook* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2005), I:97–99; for the Howsons' program and casting see *RMN*, 28 June 1869, 4.

standard of theirs since the first season in San Francisco: Henry James Byron's burlesque *Ill-treated Il Trovatore* (1863). With Emma "in trousers" as Manrico opposite Clelia's Leonora, this burlesque mingled slapstick comedy with the music of Verdi. Contrafact excerpts from *Il Trovatore* included "Tacea la notte placida" (as Leonora's "Daily the troubadour"), "Il balen del suo sorriso" (as Count di Luna's introspective "A baa lamb, Di Luna"), Azucena's show-stopping "Stride la vampa" was recreated as "See, see yon pallid infant," sung here by baritone John Jerome Howson, and the duet "Vivrà! contende il giubilo" for Leonora and the Count was rewritten as a trio with Manrico.[36] While Byron's burlesques were generally judged to be of superior quality and originality to those of his contemporaries, and the audiences and critics less rigid in their expectations, the genre did not initially provide Denver audiences with what it expected of this much anticipated opera troupe.[37]

The Howsons could not have relied on Denver audiences to fully appreciate the subtlety of the burlesque without knowing the original work. Nevertheless, they believed that the general humor found in parodying operatic conventions and the inclusion of Verdi's music (parodied or not) would mean success. This was, after all, what they had witnessed and experienced in San Francisco for some time. But the press was all but silent with any critique the next day: "There was a very fair audience at the opera last evening (despite the weather). The performance elicited much applause."[38] It is possible, of course, that neither Byers nor his pressmen were in the audience. It is also possible that operatic parody and burlesque did not evince what Denverites

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[36] A M. Riviere was credited with arranging and composing new music for the burlesque; see the front matter in, Henry James Byron, *Ill-treated Il Trovatore: Or, The Mother, the Maiden, & the Musicianer; a New Burlesque Extravaganza* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1863).

[37] On the composition and reception of Byron's burlesques, see Elizabeth A. More, "Henry James Byron and the Craft of Burlesque," *Theater Survey* 23, no. 1 (May 1982): 55–70.

[38] *RMN*, 30 June 1869, 4.

(or at least the local press) expected of an opera troupe. Langrishe's troupes had specialized to a great extent in comedy and farce ("old drama"), and opera, it was hoped, would be a "novelty for our city." Perhaps they desired something more edifying, more evocative of the society to which they aspired, and so a critical response to *Ill-treated Il Trovatore* seemed beneath both the artists and their audiences. Denver papers were not beyond a rebuke, either.

The Howsons again performed *La Grande-Duchesse* following *Ill-treated Il Trovatore*. Again, the opera bouffe was "witnessed by a large audience, and well received" and "decidedly the best performance given by the troupe, and is worthy of all praise."[39] Instead of sticking with either of the well-received Offenbach works, however, the Howsons continued to move between genres. The lackluster reception of burlesque was evidenced by the outright deleterious review of the Howsons' performance of another Henry James Byron work the following evening. *Aladdin; Or, the Wonderful Scamp*, drew its musical parodies not from opera, but from instrumental polkas and popular songs. The *News* surmised of *Aladdin*: "we cannot say that we admire such plays and would prefer to see the troupe give us something a little higher in the drama."[40] And the review went on to make a distinction in taste between factions of the audience: "Mr. Jerome [John Howson] is generally admirable in representing his female characters, but he at times performs for the gallery and becomes distasteful to the rest of his audience. We believe that more music and less low comedy would be acceptable."[41] Of course, this may be the opinion of the reviewer alone; however, this critique draws upon distinguishing between high and low

[39] *RMN*, 1 July 1869, 4.

[40] *RMN*, 2 July 1869, 4.

[41] John Jerome Howson played the travesty roles of Azucena in *Ill-treated Il Trovatore* and the Widow Twankay in *Aladdin*.

entertainment, as well as the opera's perceived reflection of social standing and appropriateness, a trope present in many articles published under Byers's direction.

The Howson and Langrishe troupes returned on July 19 to Denver after a two-week excursion to Central City, where they "came like a meteor and departed in a blaze of glory."[42] With them, they supposedly brought "an entire new series of novelties," including another Byron extravaganza, *The Orange Tree and the Humble Bee*.[43] That evening, however, they performed a vocal concert before another performance of *Tromb-al-ca-zar*—to which the *News* again did not respond—and on the second night a new presentation of the "petit" fairy-tale opera *Kate Kearney*. This piece, which was praised for its lack of "dragging or filling up with immaterial commonplace to kill time," was warmly received on account of its inclusion of traditional Irish ballads.[44] Regardless of whether or not the critics always approved, the variety of repertory made the troupe economically viable by attracting a larger swath of the population than may have been the case if they only performed opera bouffes.

After acquiring the necessary capital and attention in the city, Emma again took the starring role in *La Grande-Duchesse* on July 21, 1869. Attendance at this performance was not very good, however, owing apparently "to the moonlight party and the Ute war dance." A ritual "grand scalp dance" was taking place across the Platte River at the same time the theater was to open for the Howsons' performance. Denverites had made observing these practices from afar a regular pastime, and Byers suggested that "our eastern visitors [tourists] should see some real Indians, observing their ancient customs, and they are proud to show themselves before white

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[42] From Central City's *Daily Register Call*, 20 July 1869, 4.

[43] *RMN*, 19 July 1869, 4.

[44] *RMN*, 21 July 1869, 4. William Collier, *Kate Kearney, or The Lakes of Killarney! a Petite Opera, in Two Acts* (London: London: J. Duncombe & Co., [1836]). Emma played the role of Kate and Clelia the role of Rose Kearney.

spectators."[45] Again, as with the Gruenwalds five years before, Denverites were overcome by their fascination with plundered skulls and indigenous rituals. To poorly filled houses the Howsons performed *Mrs. Normer*, a burlesque of Bellini's opera that received no review in the press the following day, and returned a third time to *Ill-treated Il Trovatore*. The Howsons closed their two-week opera season in Denver with Offenbach's *La rose de Saint-Fleur* starring Clelia as Pierette.

Though the Howsons responded only partly to public demands for their best performances, the opera bouffe fever they ignited made a lasting impact on entertainment in Denver. Months after they had departed, the *News* began printing syndicated updates on the progress of the Howsons, and on the flourishing career of Emma in comic opera.[46] Aside from Emma and Clelia Howson, no singers to visit Denver so captured audience's imaginations until Marie Aimée arrived three years later.

A Suitable Structure, Take One

By 1872, when Governor Edward McCook established the first of several boards of immigration, Denver's leaders and civic boosters had shifted their work from subsistence to growth and promotion. Pamphlets outlining the resources and opportunities available in Colorado were printed in English and German, and distributed by agents in the east and Deep

[45] *RMN*, 22 July 1869, 4.

[46] Announcements similar to the following are found throughout the *Rocky Mountain News* in the late 1870s: "Miss Emma Howson made her debut at Wallack's opera house, New York, November 20. She alternates with Caroline Richings in singing first parts in English opera. Her success was marked. Miss Clelia and Mr. Jerome Howson are playing at Wood's museum, New York;" *RMN*, 1 December 1869, 1.

South, and as far abroad as London and Germany.[47] The campaign observed that those who imagined Denver to be a place occupied by "a half-civilized or semi-barbarous population" would be pleasantly surprised upon arriving in the territory, referring to it already as the State of Colorado, though its admission to the Union was four years off:

> The rough and desperate element, which at an early day in our history arrayed itself against law and order, and sought to control the destinies of our young State, has happily been thoroughly rooted out; and in its place we have communities of enterprising, ambitious and orderly citizens, around whom are clustered all the refining and elevating influence of the family circle. *Theatrical entertainments, concerts, lectures, festivals, balls and other amusements, are quite as frequent and as creditably managed in Colorado as in other regions of the like population* [emphasis added]. In a word, those who make Colorado their home need deprive themselves of none of the literary and social entertainments they have been accustomed to enjoying elsewhere.[48]

Denver's boosters intended for the city to be seen by outsiders as fully civilized, its cosmopolitanism affirmed by its economic importance and the availability of culture. Theatrical entertainments, ably managed and regularly presented, were an important part of the new life to be enjoyed in Denver, and could help displace whatever lingering negative perceptions of the city prevailed among prospective investors.

Several similar promotional projects were undertaken over the following decade, their efficacy proven by climbing population figures. While Denver's population had remained almost the same since 1860 (hovering around 4,750 in both the eighth and ninth censuses), its population soared to 35,629 in 1880.[49] By one estimate, the population and number of businesses

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[47] On the formal promotional campaigns of William Byers, Fred Z. Salomon, and the first Board of Immigration, see Dorsett and McCarthy, *The Queen City: A History of Denver*, 57–60.

[48] Colorado Board of Immigration, *Official Information, Colorado: A Statement of Facts Prepared and Published by Authority of the Territorial Board of Immigration* (Denver: Rocky Mountain News Steam Printing House, 1872), 24.

[49] Denver's aggregate population of white and "colored" populations was 4,729 in 1860, and 4,759 in 1870. See US Census Office, Ninth Census, *The Statistics and Population of the United States* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1872), 1:95.

tripled just in the three or four years immediately following the completion of the Denver Pacific line in June 1870.[50] With its rise as the piedmont railroad hub, and its confirmed commercial viability and centrality in the Rocky Mountains, Denver was the paragon of civilization and manifest destiny in the eyes of its boosters.

Yet the city still lacked a suitably large and well-appointed theater. As western architectural historian J. Philip Gruen has explained, boosters believed that western cities could not exist without cultural institutions, and so "the elites believed that replicating or transplanting [such institutions] across oceans or continents could, at least, provide the veneer of civilization."[51] There were deep political ties to this act of replicating institutions, and others—especially the press—were emboldened to join these calls. Furthermore, a looming changing of the guard among Denver's theater managers meant that the time was ripe to attempt the transplant of one such institution: an opera house.

Jack Langrishe and his troupe had met with several years of dwindling sales in Denver, and in June 1871 they went to Chicago for an extended season. When the Great Chicago Fire destroyed all but one theater in October, Langrishe summoned the gumption that had seen him through a decade of managing pioneer theaters. He quickly mortgaged the Denver Theater by wire—subsequently losing it and the Montana Theater in Central City over the next year in sheriff sales—and with the funds successfully seized a lease for Chicago's Globe Theater over

[50] *CHCS*, 73–75. A correspondent to George Crofutt's magazine *Western World* gave the population as 10,000 by the summer of 1872, see *RMNW*, 19 June 1872, 3; a correspondent to Topeka's *Daily Commonwealth* gave the population on the same day as 12,000 in a syndicated article printed in *RMNW*, 19 June 1872, 4.

[51] On Western promotion and distinctly urban notions of "civilization" in the Great West, see J. Philip Gruen, *Manifest Destinations*, 111–121.

every other manager in town, playing there through May 1872.[52] Langrishe's departure from Denver opened a commercial opportunity in the theatrical market, and an opportunity to build a structure that would draw new performers and patrons.

On August 24, 1871, a group of five men doing business as the "Denver Opera House Company" presented articles of incorporation to the Secretary of the Colorado Territory. This venture included as its officers: Samuel E. Browne, U.S. district attorney; Hyatt Hussey, banker at City National Bank and later treasurer of the Villa Park Neighborhood Association; Francis M. Case, U.S. surveyor-general, politician, and mayor of Denver for a partial term from 1873–1874; Charles D. Ulmer, manager of the Western Printing, Company, printer of the Denver *Commercial Advertiser*, and co-manager of the People's Theater in late 1871–January 1872; and George T. Ulmer, younger brother to Charles, actor, and co-manager of the People's Theater.[53] Their stated objective was to "construct, operate, and enjoy an Opera House" by raising $100,000, divided evenly into a thousand shares at $100 apiece.[54] Whereas most of Denver's theaters had been owned and operated by the same few individuals (Langrishe and Co.) since 1860, this company proposed a new means of financing entertainment with stocks and subscriptions. If the Opera House Company succeeded, their proposed venue would become a local glory, a center for entertainment in the auditorium and commerce in the storefronts that surrounded it, and the embodiment of civic largesse; if it failed (which it did), the restrictive

[52] The Globe was the only theater in Chicago to survive the fire. On the Langrishe troupe in Chicago, see Lauterbach and Lauterbach, *Comedian of the Frontier*, 115–123.

[53] Affiliations as available in the first published city directory, Corbett, Hoye & Co.'s, *Directory of the City of Denver for 1873*, as well as Smiley, *History of Denver*. Charles and George Ulmer's early years are the subject of the latter's memoires, *Adventures and Reminiscences of a Volunteer; Or, A Drummer Boy from Maine* (1892), which were produced after his marriage to the actress Lizzie May Ulmer (also his half-sister).

[54] "Incorporation Records for the Denver Opera House Co.," S500, D:357, Colorado State Archives. An anecdotal overview of the Denver Opera House Co. is also given in Melvin Schoberlin, *From Candles to Footlights: A Biography of the Pike's Peak Theater 1859–1876* (Denver: The Old West Publishing Co., 1941), 215–223.

Denver Theater would remain the principal venue in the city, encumbered by its small stage, and insufficient to draw larger ensembles and star performers.

In an editorial column titled "A New Opera House Scheme," Byers began lobbying for the proposed theater. He noted that the city's seven thousand inhabitants were more or less cultivated and "esthetically inclined," but had to "pack themselves into a dingy and dilapidated old shell [the Denver Theater]." A new opera house—as proposed by the company whose "scheme" Byers was publicly backing—would "be hailed as an especially desirable improvement." Throwing his undeniable influence behind their enterprise, he continued:

> This want, we are glorified to chronicle, is about to be supplied, and Denver, probably before another August comes round, will boast to the finest opera house west of Chicago. An opera house company, comprising names which guarantee success, has just been formed, some of the stockholders in which are residents of this city, others residing abroad. One of the parties to the project, a gentleman late of Boston, has had large experience in theatrical management.
>
> The plans of the architect, as exhibited to us, indicate the erection of a building with a frontage of sixty feet and the depth of one hundred and fifty; to be two stories high, covered with a Mansard roof. . . . The parquet is to have an area of 36x36 feet. There will be a dress circle, a family circle, and a gallery—the latter for the accommodation of the gods. There is to be four private boxes, two on each side of the stage; and the stage will have a width of sixty and a depth of fifty-five feet. Over the twin stores, on the second floor, will be offices. The plans if executed as proposed will afford us a building corresponding to the famous Globe theater of Boston.[55]

Knowledge of Boston's Globe Theater must have come principally from George Ulmer, who had played bit-parts at that theater during 1870, and no other reference to this "famous" theater has been found in the Denver press before his arrival. Though the Opera House Company never named an architect, and more formal plans never did manifest themselves in print or for public review, the preliminary dimensions do bear a significant resemblance to its east-coast

[55] "A New Opera House Scheme," *RMN*, 9 August 1871, 1.

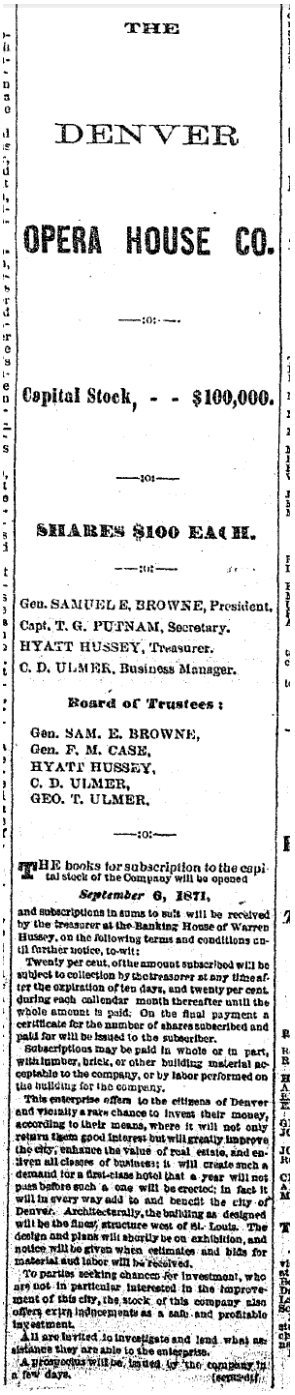
antecedent.[56] In short, it was a structure worthy of emulation, an institution that had proven its centrality to a civil society and as a social space of ritual and custom.

The advertisements made no promise of financial gain for stock holders, and the house would almost certainly operate more as a charity or not-for-profit cooperative than an actual business. Purchasing stock was by no means an investment. Nevertheless, subscribing to the Opera House Company came with a certain increase to benefactors' social status, and announced an individual family's disposable wealth and commitment to the public good. The willingness of some local citizens to advocate for such a venture indicates that the existing structures were no longer suitable to the needs of the growing community, and that they were willing to charitably support the types of art that would improve aesthetic and intellectual tastes.

To undertake building a venue similar to Boston's Globe Theater meant that Denver could offer the caliber of entertainment sought by its east-coast migrants and visitors. And to this end the Opera Company and *News* aggressively solicited the sale of stocks beginning September 6, 1871. Their petition was made not only to the city's wealthiest citizens, but even those who wished to make their contribution "in whole or in part, with timber, brick or other building materials . . . or by labor performed on the building for the company." The purchase of shares was hyped as "a rare chance to invest their money, according to their means, where it will not only return them good interest but will greatly improve the city, enhance the value of real estate, and enliven all classes of business." Such a structure, it advocates argued, would spur a boom in commerce and development, increase the number of patrons who frequented the promising

[56] Originally managed by John Selwyn, the Globe was an opulent structure boasting a state-of-the-art ventilation system, sunken footlights with color reflectors, and nearly two hundred border lights on the proscenium that were operated from the prompter's desk. Donald C. King, *The Theaters of Boston: A Stage and Screen History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 56.

downtown area, and draw artists who would improve the cultural cachet of the city. In short, they believed the Opera House would "in every way add to and benefit the city of Denver."[57]



THE

DENVER

OPERA HOUSE CO.

—101—

Capital Stock, - - $100,000.

—101—

SHARES $100 EACH.

—101—

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Gen. SAM. E. BROWNE,
Gen. F. M. CASE,
HYATT HUSSEY,
C. D. ULMER,
GEO. T. ULMER.

—101—

THE books for subscription to the capital stock of the Company will be opened

September 6, 1871,

and subscriptions in sums to suit will be received by the treasurer at the Banking House of Warren Hussey, on the following terms and conditions until further notice, to-wit:

Twenty per cent. of the amount subscribed will be subject to collection by the treasurer at any time after the expiration of ten days, and twenty per cent. during each calendar month thereafter until the whole amount is paid. On the final payment a certificate for the number of shares subscribed and paid for will be issued to the subscriber.

Subscriptions may be paid in whole or in part, with lumber, brick, or other building material acceptable to the company, or by labor performed on the building for the company.

This enterprise offers to the citizens of Denver and vicinity a rare chance to invest their money, according to their means, where it will not only return them good interest but will greatly improve the city, enhance the value of real estate, and enliven all classes of business; it will create such a demand for a first-class hotel that a year will not pass before such a one will be erected; in fact it will in every way add to and benefit the city of Denver. Architecturally, the building as designed will be the finest structure west of St. Louis. The design and plans will shortly be on exhibition, and notice will be given when estimates and bids for material and labor will be received.

To parties seeking chances for investment, who are not in particular interested in the improvement of this city, the stock of this company also offers extra inducements as a safe and profitable investment.

All are invited to investigate and lend what assistance they are able to the enterprise.

A prospectus will be issued by the company in a few days. (sept-d1f)

Figure 6 Advertisement selling shares of the Denver Opera House Company. (*RMN*, 6 September 1871, 4.)

[57] Advertisement, *RMN*, 6 September 1871, 4.

Despite the novelty of this business venture and the need for a more functional theater, their efforts did not ultimately take shape. After October 11, 1871, their ads faded from the *News*, and none of the officers remained seriously engaged with theatrical management or philanthropy for more than a few months. The local presses never again mentioned the Denver Opera House Company, and no further documents were filed with the territory or city. By the spring of 1872, the company had apparently dissolved; George Ulmer returned to Boston, and his brother Charles, while appearing from time to time in small roles over the years, focused on growing his printing business. Denver's culture-loving population would have to continue patronizing the Denver Theater, awaiting those periodic appearances of combination companies that ventured west.

Marie Aimée and Foreign-Language Opera in Denver

As we have seen, Offenbach's works were first introduced in Denver by the Howsons; but it was soprano Marie Aimée (1852–1887) who introduced audiences to this *morceau* of Parisian culture as it was originally experienced—in French. She arrived in New York in 1870 under the auspices of magnate James Fisk, toured the country with her supporting Aimée French Opera Bouffe troupe, performed under the baton of Offenbach during his tour of America in 1876, and for seventeen years headed one of the few foreign-language opera companies that continued attracting large (i.e., economically heterogeneous) audiences after the Panic of 1873.[58]

[58] See Alexander McClintock's biographical note on Aimée in Jacques, Offenbach, *Orpheus in America: Offenbach's Diary of His Journey to the New World*, trans. Alexander McClintock (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), 182–183n6; as well as Preston, *Opera for the People*, 46–48. On Fisk's first ventures in producing *opéras bouffes*, see James Oliver Morgan, "French Comic Opera in New York, 1855–1890" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1959), 159–170. On Offenbach's tour of America see Senelick, *Jacques Offenbach and the Making of Modern Culture*, 136–137. Additionally, the composer's own memoirs provide colorful glimpses at his indebtedness to Aimée for championing his work in America; so much so that, upon arriving in the city of "X—" on their way to Chicago, he continued to conduct the "small, but wretched" orchestra after discovering that his orchestration had been entirely altered, yielding "strange sounds which bore no likeness to my operetta." See

Though her star in America rose after English-language opera bouffe performances were already common, her ingenuity in presentation and skill at management aided the popularity of her performances of *opéras bouffes* despite their performance in French.[59]

Aimée appealed to audiences because of her beautiful figure and voice, which was described as "clear, sweet, flexible and sympathetic." Her first-rate acting relieved audiences of needing to understand French. Though Offenbach's works were regularly berated in the press for their immorality, and "French" was used as a euphemism to describe performances in which the female form was "undraped" and hypersexualized, it was seldom reported that Aimée was offensive in her presentation. As Katherine Preston observed from Aimée's critical reception, "her acting was natural, arch, vivacious, and impulsive, but always within the bounds of essential 'womanly grace and coquetry.'"[60] Aimée specialized in the works of Offenbach and Lecocq at a time when the American middle-class disenchantment with foreign-language opera was taking hold. She persisted in bringing to stages around the country a repertory that imprinted itself on lyric theater in America, though opera bouffe was truly populist only when sung in English.

By 1872, Denver audiences knew something of what to expect with this new, modern genre performed by "Mademoiselle Aimee," having been exposed to Offenbach by way of the

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Jacques Offenbach, *Offenbach in America: Notes of a Travelling Musician*, trans. Albert Wolff (New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., 1877), 180–186.

[59] I have adapted the practice of italicizing and observing linguistic diacritics to indicate that these works were performed by Aimée's company in French.

[60] Preston, *Opera for the People*, 46; her reference to "womanly grace and coquetry" is drawn from "Opera Bouffe at Pike's Opera House—Debut of M'lle Aimee," *Cincinnati Commercial*, 15 June 1871, 8. On the other hand, Senelick has offered another review from New York that reveals a more seductive presentation by Aimée: "in Helen's bedchamber scene [Aimée] was said to surpass "in daring indecorum and positive viciousness anything that can be remembered. [She] is literally half nude . . . The dialogue is shamelessly coarse, and no gesture or grimace that can add to the effect of a singularly disgusting and repulsive scene is spared."" For this quotation and information on the moralist argument against Offenbach's operas, see "'La Belle Hélène' at the Olympic [New York]," unidentified clipping, Harvard Theater Collection," as quoted in Senelick, "The Pan of Pruriency," in *Jacques Offenbach and the Making of Modern Culture*, 133–134.

Howsons' English-language performance of *La Grande-Duchesse* in 1869. Two weeks before the Aimée French Opera Bouffe troupe opened its run at the Denver Theater, "handsome bills" began appearing around F street (now 15th Street) above Lawrence; that is, in the heart of the freshly paved downtown promenade, in the vicinity of the City Court House and office of the *Denver Daily Times* (Byers's first significant competition). Her French-language *opéras bouffes* performances were to be as "charming as [they are] novel," and "the piquant, pretty and vivacious Mademoiselle Aimee" would be accompanied by an "accomplished troupe which is said to be the largest of the kind that ever ventured upon the confines of the Rocky Mountains."[61]

Though the hype around Aimée was nothing out of the ordinary, it was nevertheless true that Aimée was performing foreign-language opera in Denver for the first time since the Gruenwalds in 1864. The press piqued the public's curiosity as they awaited her lively, effervescent performances. First, they touted her performances as "genuine." This meant that she sang in French, of course, while also suggesting that the Howsons almost certainly made substantial cuts when performing their opera bouffes in translation. The *News* also referred to the differences in presenting comic opera and French grand opera; not only was Aimée's singing "sweet" and her acting "fascinating," but in these areas she excelled in a manner that was "far superior to that which ordinary French opera demand or obtains." The press otherwise made no examination of her career or the genre; nor did they print synopses, as was the practice for most theatrical performances. They implied, instead, that readers were already familiar with her, and that it was "superfluous to repeat the many praises which have been so frequently bestowed upon Aimee." She had been "rewarded with large and delighted audiences," and so the Denver press puffed local advertisements so that local audiences would offer her the same welcome reception:

[61] "Opera Bouffe," *RMN*, 12 June 1872, 4.

> [To Denver] comes the far-famed Aimee Opera troupe . . . to fill the vacuum with their soul-inspiring operas, which all at least can feel and admire alike although rendered in a tongue not known to all. The power of music, after all, is in the voice, not the tongue, and in the heart more than either. The nightingale sings as sweetly as if every note that it utters contained a distinct idea expressed in English. The appearance of a first-class opera troupe in Denver is an epoch in the history of our city, and a compliment to it, which the good taste of our people will no doubt appreciate and reward as it deserves, by an overflowing house every night during the brief engagement of this company. We cannot welcome them to a theater like that Saint Martin, in Paris, or the Academy of Music, in Philadelphia, but we can certainly prove to Mademoiselle Aimee that as the equal, if not superior, of Irma [Marié], she will have no lack of listeners and admirers in her favorite *role* of Boulette, especially if she should find in M. Noe, as we hope, a suitable counterpart (like Aujac) for Barbe Bleue. Mademoiselle's face and figure also are as striking as her voice is sweet.[62]

Even in Denver, the press (or Aimée's pressman) felt they could effectually promote Aimée by comparing her to Irma Marié, another French singer who specialized in *opéras bouffes*, though she was almost exclusively active on the eastern seaboard before 1872. Additionally, they drew attention to Marié's leading tenor, Abel Aujac, who was regaled by the *Spirit of the Times* as "one of the best tenors and certainly the finest comic actor." Confidently identifying Aimée's onstage paramour "Noe" has been difficult, though this could be the same tenor who appears as Noë Cadeau during Grau's 1881 season in New York, who was "a good actor, but utterly destitute of voice, and is therefore unacceptable as a "cadeau" [gift]."[63] And in this article, we see again the booster's efforts to de-emphasize the theater's limited functionality against those of substantially larger cities, while also encouraging the enthusiasm of the audiences that awaited her. The Denver Theater was, admittedly, not a large enough venue for

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[62] *Denver Daily Times*, 20 June 1872, 1.

[63] Irma Marié began her American career when she replaced Lucille Tostée in Bateman's company while the star convalesced after a rigorous touring schedule. Marié belonged to a venerable family of French opera singers; notably, her elder sister was Celestine Galli-Marié, Thomas's first Mignon and Bizet's first Carmen. On Marié and Aujac, especially their reputation for presenting *Barbe-bleue*, see quotation in Morgan, "French Comic Opera in New York, 1855–1890," 96–97; for the review of Noë Cadeau's performance in Grau's fall 1882 production of "La Mascotte," see *Music and Drama* IV, no. 1, 7 October 1882, 9.

Aimée and her company to bring in the receipts to which they were accustomed, so the press did its best to make up what the company would miss out on in income with enthusiastic promotion.

Tickets for this "short season of French Opera" went on sale June 13 at S. A. Grant & Co.'s Bookstore. Subscription for reserved season tickets were sold at $10 per patron, while reserved seats for a single performance were $3, and admission to the gallery (not reserved) cost $1.[64] The Denver Pacific Railway arranged to sell up to one hundred seats in a special excursion car from Cheyenne for those who were attracted "hither by the fame alike of Denver and Aimee." The details of the excursion were given in the *Cheyenne Daily Leader*: "The excursions to Denver will come off Thursday the 20th inst. Tickets for the round trip, five dollars . . . This will give our citizens two nights and one day in Denver, and afford them an opportunity to hear the finest opera that has ever been west of the Missouri river."[65] Aimée's season opened the evening of Thursday, June 20, 1872, assured by the *News* that her performance of *La Grande-Duchesse* "cannot fail of success in a city where there is so much culture, refinement, wealth and public spirit."[66] This was followed on Friday by *La Périchole*, a "Grand Saturday Matinee" reprise of *La Grande-Duchesse*, and an evening performance of *Barbe-bleue* closed the season.

Aimée's troupe performed at the Denver Theater, which was then managed by Ralph Phelps, another local actor turned manager who took possession of the theater from the Ulmer brothers, and had made it more comfortable by installing extra stoves and "stopping up the crannies."[67] A "fine *chambre*" was present to greet Aimée and her company, the house filled to

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[64] *RMN*, 20 June 1872, 1. In 2017 equivalences, reserved tickets in the orchestra and parquette for the four performances would cost a relative value of $207, for the same sections to one performance $62.10, and $20.70 for an evening-of ticket to the gallery.

[65] *RMN*, 20 June 1872, 4; *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, 19 June 1872, 4.

[66] *RMN*, 20 June 1872, 4

[67] Schoberlin, *From Candles to Footlights*, 221–222.

capacity.[68] One reviewer for the *Daily Times* spoke of the close communion of nature and the perfection of art present in her performance. Though the performance was given in French, and therefore unintelligible to most of the audience, it was nevertheless "as much a sensation here as the cholera would [be] in Paris," especially because of the admirable orchestral accompaniment. Aimée's acting transcended the bounds of language, so much so that it would have been the same no matter what language she sang in: "It was not the Grand Duchesse of Gerolstein," trumpeted her admiring reviewer, "it was Aimee."[69] *La Périchole* likewise drew a full house, and it was as the bayadère Périchole that Aimée stole the hearts of her Denver audience. They found the poor street singer more noble than the Grand Duchess, and even when she painted her face—a practice that was remarked upon daily by the press—Aimée could not disguise "her real beauty." Aimée had given Denver audiences what they wanted from an internationally recognized opera star. The only problem was that, despite the success of Aimée's short season, impresarios were still hard pressed to find opera companies who would risk the investment required of the current circumstances to make a performance there feasible.

A Suitable Structure, Take Two, and Policing "Opera"

Chicagoan Henry Perkins attended a choral convention sponsored by the Denver Choral Union during the spring of 1873, and later recorded his impressions when he returned home in Robert Goldbeck's periodical *The Musical Independent*. Perkins mentioned a "fine hall, with a seating capacity of at least one thousand" that was among a number of modern improvements made in the city, along with the street railway and a large public school. This was the Governor's

[68] "Opera Bouffe," *RMN*, 21 June 1872, 4.

[69] *Denver Daily Times*, 21 June 1872, 1.

Guard Hall at the corner of Fifteenth and Curtis Streets. As it neared completion, the *News* reported, "as a matter of interest to readers at home and abroad," that the Guard Hall building would be a vibrant multi-purpose building, equipped with a dining room, kitchen, dressing rooms, two furnaces, ventilators, and gas-light reflectors throughout to illuminate its rich decorations.[70] Its footprint measured fifty by one hundred and twenty-five feet, with the main hall occupying almost the entirety of that area on the upper floor. At one end of the hall there was an elevated stage, measuring forty-six feet across by eighteen feet deep. The dress circle, a balcony which ran the length of the other three sides of the room, was suspended by trusses, keeping the main floor of the theater free of any obstruction, including permanent seating. This was in the interest of the facility's primary use as a drill hall, suitable for accommodating training of the governor's militia. From the Guard Hall's elegantly mansard tower, one could take in the expanse of Denver, its borders and people ever encroaching on the frontier. Inside, patrons enjoyed public lectures, dances, roller-skating, chorus and orchestra concerts, and every kind of staged entertainment that made its way into the West.

The total cost of the structure was a mere $26,000, "the greatest surprise seeming to be that so fine a structure has been secured for so small a sum."[71] Its construction was funded through the efforts of a "large number of citizens" who "subscribed and paid in the capital which has built it," while the land was granted by the territorial governor Edward M. McCook. It was publicly subscribed philanthropy that built this edifice of volunteer militarism, which would double as Denver's cultural center. The Denver Choral Union and Männerchor performed at its

[70] *RMN*, 3 January 1873, 2.

[71] US$(2017)510,000. *RMN*, 22 February 1873, 4.

dedicatory ceremony on February 21, 1873.[72] In his benediction to close the ceremony, the Reverend George M. Randall, first Episcopal bishop of the Missionary District of Colorado and Parts Adjacent, offered this reflection on the inherent value of the Guard Hall: "Grant that the edifice within whose walls we have met tougher, may be made the instrument of good to this community, in promoting good morals and good manners, the increase of useful knowledge, and the culture of a pure taste, the inculcation of principles of patriotism and religion."[73]

Figure 7 View of the Guard's Hall or Forrester's Opera House, at 15th and Curtis Streets in Denver, c. 1873. (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, X-18546, detail.)

[72] Männerchor sang the "Reiterlied" (Warrior Song) "Auf's Ross, und das Schwert heraus" by H. Oberhoffer with text by Oscar von Redwitz. The Choral Union performed "When the Lord turned again the captivity" from William B. Bradbury's "short oratorio" *The Beautiful Queen*, which was published by the Oliver Ditson Company of Boston in a version designed for "musical conventions and festivals."

[73] *RMN*, 22 February 1873, 4.

While the Guard Hall's winsome reputation earned favor among the socially and morally minded of the city, its intermittent attractions did not succeed in drawing all Denverites to its doors. In an extended renunciation of the "hoodlums of Denver"—the throngs of able-bodied loafers "who line our streets, and fill our concert saloons"—Byers stated that the Guard Hall stared down Fifteenth Street with the "indifference of sublime contempt and ignorance," toward other venues of "demoralizing influence" still dotting the city. These concert saloons and music halls bred "vice and crime as naturally as ducks swim." His report goes on to give a fuller sense of their clientele, comments reminiscent of recriminations made a decade earlier about Cibola Hall:

> . . . a noisy but inefficient orchestra hard at work in one corner adding to the general confusion . . . All the voices of the noisy street blending together in one deep, deafening din, and you can have some faint idea of a Denver concert room. At last the orchestra seems to play itself out of tunes, if it ever had any, and the shabby curtain rises upon the shabby stage, and the shabby artists arranged in a shabby row of shabby chairs. The entertainment is about what might be expected . . . So much so that we cannot even indicate its character in these columns. . . . The sooner Denver is free of such institutions the better it will be for her present and future welfare.[74]

Despite the allure of other venues and their various entertainments, the management of the Guard Hall worked to establish it as the place for respectable entertainment in the city. Mr. James E. Diggett, who taught music at the East Denver Public School, and his wife were called upon to present the Guard Hall's first amateur opera production. Early in May 1873, Diggett presented George Stratton's juvenile operetta *Laila*—partly a pastiche with favorite melodies including "The Last Rose of Summer" and Henry Bishop's "Home, Sweet Home"—at the Denver Theater.[75] The venture was so successful that they wished to repeat it at the more

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[74] *RMN*, 22 February 1873, 4.

[75] *RMN*, 15 May 1873, 4; G. W. Stratton, *Laila: Juvenile Opera, in Three Parts* (Boston: G. W. Stratton and CO., 1867).

spacious Guard Hall.[76] There the Diggetts presented *Genevieve*, also written by Stratton for solo children's voices and children's chorus.[77] Two benefit performance were given on September 2 and 4, 1873, to aid the Railroad Mission Sunday Schools, which evangelized by providing street youth with cheap meals, and women and girls with Bible classes and relief for food and clothing.[78] The News regretted that not half of the seats in the Guard Hall were filled, but praised the production nonetheless, saying that it offered the young voices "plenty of chance for a display of good singing."[79] A two-year fallow passed before another operatic production was given at the Guard Hall, juvenile or otherwise.

In the end, the Guard Hall was a military drill hall and armory, usable at best as a dance hall owing to the limitations of its stage and want of comfortable seating:

> The trouble with Guard Hall is that it is designed for all kinds of assemblages, and the result is that it is good for but one—viz., balls, or promenade concerts, where seats are not required. A good hall for theatrical and other exhibitions, and dances also, cannot well be made. It is to be hoped that the next one built in Denver will be for seated audiences exclusively.[80]

Its limitations proved insurmountable to the current management, and evidently the Guard Hall would need new leadership and a renovation before accommodating legitimate theater and opera troupes. Such a change in management came in the fall of 1876 when the structure was bought by Nate Forrester for $20,000, a depreciation in the value of the building of more than one-third

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[76] *RMN*, 16 May 1873, 4.

[77] G. W. Stratton, *Genevieve: An Operetta* (Boston: G. W. Stratton and Co., 1870).

[78] *RMN*, 2 September 1873, 4.

[79] *RMN*, 3 September 1873, 4.

[80] *Denver Daily Times*, 8 November 1875, 2.

over three years. [81] Clearly, the financial crush of the Panic of 1873 effected not only the ability of boosters to sustain legitimate theater, but also the value of the physical structures that housed them and managers' openness to the financial risk required to fill the boards with professional talent.

After Marie Aimée's departure from Denver in 1872, there followed another prolonged operatic drought. Not more than three travelling troupes offered a handful of staged plays with music over the next four years. These productions were routinely advertised as operas, despite their having no full score, and being essentially spoken comedies with popular songs and the occasional aria interpolated to enliven their plots. Though still entertaining, some of these works were now forty years old, and seemed dry when compared to Offenbach's sweet operatic champagne. On account of its remoteness, however, Denver still could not draw well-known performers and opera companies with any regularity. Physical limitations of the city's theaters continued to dictate the kinds of productions they could offer, though wavering enthusiasm for opera was also to blame. Following a poorly attended concert with opera arias given by the local Handel and Haydn Society, the *News* admonished readers for not attending the performance, citing provincialism and contentment with low-brow entertainment: "Denver claims to be, and is in some sense, a musical centre, but it is nevertheless too true that burnt cork opera is preferred before the regular thing."[82] Two examples from this period illustrate the fluidity of "opera" and how freely managers applied the term to build expectations and draw a crowd.

Between February and June of 1874, soprano Octavia Coriell—whose singing was described as "inexplicably charming" and was rivaled in Denver only by Emma Howson—joined

[81] The relative value of building the Guard Hall is equivalent to US$(2017)761,000—not accounting for the value of the land, as far as can be known from reports— the sale of it to Forrester is equivalent to US$(2017)472,000.

[82] "The Handel and Haydn Concert," *RMN*, 5 November 1875, 4.

a local company leasing the Denver Theater.[83] She starred in several performances of John Baldwin Buckstone's musical comedies *The Child of the Regiment* (1844) and *The Pet of the Petticoats* (1831), and an adaptation of Dion Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn* (1860) with "several Irish ballads [sung] most sweetly and with great fervor."[84] Not one of these works was an opera, contrary to what others have stated about the same performances.[85] Nevertheless, the theater's manager surely expected that by describing them as such and employing at least one expertly trained singer, they could raise the image of the company and improve sales.

A year later, in November 1875, an otherwise unknown group identified as the Ware-Lenton Opera Company arrived "direct from England" to perform an otherwise unidentified "opera" titled *All My Love* at the Guard's Hall.[86] Described as a variety of "comic opera, acrobatic feats, and modern minstrelsy," *All My Love* did not meet expectations. Reviewers

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[83] *RMN*, 15 February 1874, 4. In the course of this research, no other reference to Octavia Coriell was found outside of Denver.

[84] *RMN*, 19 February 1874, 1. For further commentary on Coriell's performances, see *RMN*, 10 February 1874, 4; *RMN*, 12 February 1874, 1. "Musical comedy," in the sense used on the title pages of Buckstone's published scripts, described a play with a comic musical subject, often involving a dancing master, and that preexisting music could be sung during the performance as part of the story. As Deane Root has noted, Buckstone's use of "musical comedy" as a genre precedes E. E. Rice's *Evangeline* by eight years, which has otherwise been considered the first stage work in America described as such. Both *The Child of the Regiment* and *The Pet of the Petticoats* were first performed in London, and introduced at Niblo's Garden in New York City in the 1860s. The script for John Baldwin Buckstone's *The Child of the Regiment* identifies at least one musical number, "Salut a la France," from Donizetti's opera. Root, *American Popular Stage Music*, 37.

[85] Perhaps due to the similarity of their titles, Linscome assumed that *The Child of the Regiment* and *The Colleen Bawn* were Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* and Julius Benedict's *The Lily of Killarney* (1862); however, neither of these pieces could have been undertaken by a company the size of Coriell's; Linscome, "History of Musical Development in Denver," 197; these same errors in describing these works were repeated in Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*.

[86] Also billed as Mrs. George Ware's Opera Bouffe Company and the Great Lenton Family, the Ware-Lenton troupe reportedly traveled through Denver "en route to Calcutta (expressly engaged to give their entertainment during the visit of H.R.M. the Prince of Wales in India)." They were also scheduled to perform Dion Boucicault's play *The O'Dowd*, but it is unclear from reviews if they did. See the front-page advertisements for the Ware-Lenton performances on November 8, 9, and 10 that began running in *RMN*, 3 November 1875, 1. The *Tribune* stated that the company had a "fine reputation both in Europe and in this country," and also made the claim that they had just arrived from England; *Tribune*, 8 November 1875, 2.

praised the acrobatic performance, but of the comic opera part, there was "not much to be said about it, either in praise or blame." In sum, wrote the *News*, the "whole performance may well rank as a popular performance."[87] The following week, Central City audiences were not as reserved with their disdain. "Before the fraud was half consummated," as their performance was referenced, most of the audience had left the theater, and the closing comment from the *News* on the Ware-Lenton troupe was conclusive: "For a 'comic' opera troupe, the Wares are about as mournful a failure as can well be imagined."[88] These entertainments advertised as opera were clearly shadows of what audiences had come to expect after seeing the Howsons and Marie Aimée. For opera to flourish in Denver, it would be necessary to have a more suitable structure and a regular opera season given by star performers in order to maintain audience's interest.

Denver's dearth of opera, however, reflects a larger national trend during the mid-1870s, one that can be attributed to the Panic of 1873 and the ensuing depression. The economic crisis had an especially negative impact on American spoken theater, and the number of quality itinerant companies decreased precipitously. On the other hand, as Katherine Preston has described, its effect on opera was more nuanced, and correlated with the repertory and language in which a company performed. Combination opera companies continued to produce seasons of opera in English in large cities. They arranged tours of works they knew would sell and which required taking only a limited number of auxiliary forces, specifically few chorus and orchestral

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[87] "The Comic Opera," *RMN*, 9 November 1875, 4.

[88] The review from Central City's *Daily Register Call* on the Ware-Lenton's performances was partially reported in Denver in "A Critic on the 'Comic Opera,' *RMN*, 14 November 1875, 4. See also Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 195. Performances in Central City were held at the Belvidere Theater before the opening of the still active Central City Opera House in 1878. In 2016, the Belvidere was listed as one of Colorado's most endangered places; it was saved from demolition on September 18, 2018 when it was placed on a long-term lease to the city. This picturesque saloon-theater was the setting of the 1976 film "The Duchess and the Dirtwater Fox," a Western romantic comedy starring Goldie Hawn and George Segal; John Scarffe, "Belvidere Theater Leased," *The Mountain Ear*, 15 November 2018, http://themtnear.com/2018/11/belvidere-theater-leased-2/.

musicians, on the road. Whether these companies succeeded or failed, continued to produce or disbanded, determined how many seasons they remained active. Foreign companies producing foreign-language opera, however, were not in a position to risk as much. Due to a weakened American economy, fewer European artists could justify a tour to the United States, and a tour of the American West was even less prudent. Although American theater-goers still considered opera a diverting form of entertainment, this favorability extended only to certain kinds of opera, including opera bouffe, operetta, and English grand opera.[89] It was two vernacular-language opera companies that stumbled their way through the economic crisis and shepherded Denverites from the cool period of "opera" reception described above into an era of opera fever: the Oates Comic Opera Company and the Richings-Bernard Grand English Opera Company. Both presented a variety of operas despite crippling setbacks, including financial and physical challenges of western tours, and several unkind assessments of their work from the Denver press.

Cautionary Tales: Alice Oates, Caroline Richings, and Production Busts

Alice Oates (1849–1887) was active at the same time and in many of the same places as Marie Aimée, though she made her mark purveying opera bouffe in English. Originally from Nashville, Alice Oates—who was regularly billed as Mrs. James A. Oates to highlight the morality of her performances—organized her first burlesque ensemble in 1868, and by early 1871 was leading a comic opera company. She excelled at English versions of opera bouffes by Jacques Offenbach and Charles Lecocq, several of which she introduced in English translations

[89] On the Panic of 1873 and its profound impact on the production of foreign-language opera and the shift in patronage among middle-class American to opera in English, see Preston, *Opera for the People*, esp. ch. 5, "Foreign-Language Opera is Exclusive; Vernacular is 'For the People.'" Regarding the impact of the depression on spoken theater stock companies, see Peter A. Davis, "From Stock to Combination: The Panic of 1873 and Its Effects on the American Theater Industry," *Theater History Studies* 8 (1988): 1–9.

for the first time.[90] Although opera bouffe companies and their leading singers were judged harshly, especially on their physical appearance and any whiff of impropriety, they remained undeniably popular with audiences, and introduced a great part of the continent to a highly accessible repertory.[91] While foreign-language opera companies were floundering in the wake of the 1873 Panic, Oates was thriving as an impresario and performer by presenting opera bouffe in the vernacular at affordable prices in new markets.

In the spring of 1876, not long before Colorado was admitted as a state, this transformation in operatic tastes took hold in Denver. Alice Oates arrived with her company from San Francisco, where opera bouffe had become "almost a necessary ingredient in the amusement diet." This was not her first season touring the American West, but it was her first to include Denver.[92] On May 23, Oates and her advertised company of thirty-two artists, a grand chorus, and full orchestra (possibly a promoter's overstated description of the ensemble) opened five days of performances at the Denver Theater. Their season included performances of Lecocq's *Giroflé-Girofla* and *Madame Angot's Child*, along with Offenbach's *Princess of Trebizonde*,

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[90] On the early repertory of Alice Oates, see Gerald Bordman and Richard Norton, *American Musical Theater: A Chronicle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28–29.

[91] Preston, *Opera for the People*, 48–49.

[92] Engagements for the James A. Oates Comic Opera Company in California during 1876 lasted seventeen weeks under the management of Thomas Maguire. Their arrival was announced in the *Daily Alta California*, 13 February 1876, 4; their departure from California, "en route for Chicago, with the intention, however, of stopping at Salt Lake City and Denver while en route," was also announced in the *Sacramento Daily Union*, 15 May 1876, 3. A review of Alice Oates's first week in San Francisco gives a good sense of her appeal to audiences, and the discrepancy in reception with critics who were excessively disparaging toward opera bouffe performers: "Critics are more captious than before, and are disposed to ask what are her attractions. The question is easily answered. She attracts by genuine hard work, and a lesson might be taken of her by many more prominent artists. She is the essence of vitality, and from the moment of her appearance upon the stage an audience can see that she is bent with all her might upon their enjoying themselves. She is here, there and everywhere; stage manager, prima donna, and anything else that may be necessary upon the spur of the moment. Whatever her lyric faults or shortcomings, this strong disposition to please redeems much and furnishes a very enjoyable opera bouffe entertainment in the absence of its higher exponents;" *Daily Alta California*, 20 February 1876, 1.

Grand Duchess, and a double bill with *Les Bavards* and Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial by Jury*.[93] Both works by Lecocq, which were entirely new to Denver audiences, had been introduced by Oates in America in English translations shortly after Aimée performed them in French in New York.[94] *Madame Angot's Child* was the favorite among Denver's audiences. The *News* stated that it was the "richest, rarest and raciest of the entire repertoire of the Bouffe species" ever to be presented.[95] Its piquancy likely derived not only from its anti-government plot of the first two acts, but also from the heroine's radical independence to choose her paramour, weaving a hint of sexual politics into a piece whose English version dovetailed with the social purity movement.

For this week of opera, ticket prices were raised to $2 for dress circle and parquette seats, and $1 for gallery seats.[96] Though not nearly as expensive as tickets to Aimée's performances, these were still above the average price of admission to other musical events. Either the Denver Theater, Alice Oates, or perhaps both felt that changing this practice and publishing their ticket prices would reinforce the value of the performances—reasoning that their performances were of better quality than others held at the theater, and that audiences would get more for their money. At the end of the week, the *News* revealed that the season of opera had been a moderate financial success, with receipts totaling $1,700, leaving them with enough to pay their expenses and no

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[93] Repertory as advertised preceding their arrival, beginning with *RMN*, 17 May 1876, 4.

[94] Kurt Gänzl, "*La fille de Madame Angot,* Opéra-comique in 3 acts" *The Encyclopedia of the Musical Theater* (blog), *Operetta Research Center*, 1 January 2001, http://operetta-research-center.org/la-fille-de-madame-angot-opera-comique-3-acts/.

[95] *RMN*, 27 May 1876, 4.

[96] A $1 ticket would be equivalent to $(USD2017)21.40. It was uncommon to see advertised ticket prices for other events held at the Denver Theater around the same time, and not at all typical for companies to report on the outcome of sales as Oates did at the end of the week. For months both before and after the opera troupe visited Denver, only one other group advertised their ticket prices: the Tennessee Jubilee Singers $1 for dress circle and parquette seats, $0.50 for gallery seats; see, *DDT*, 17 April 1876, 4. Jack Langrishe, who again rented the Denver Theater for a short season in February and March 1876, never advertised ticket prices, which unfortunately leaves us without a point of comparison to a well-established dramatic stock company.

more.[97] This admission may have even been a sobering understatement, however. Given the average fare per mile for passenger travel by railway in 1876, it would have cost just under $1,000 to transport her company of thirty-two artists from San Francisco to Denver.[98] If the Denver Theater took thirty percent of the sales off the top, it seems that Oates's may have only netted between $400 and $450 to be divided among her company, and even less as the company likely covered room and board. Producing opera is never a sound investment, but without a private philanthropist to back their efforts, it is evident that touring to Denver would all but break even the highest quality troupes.

Although mostly positive, Oates's time in Denver was not without complications. She and her company were beset by a pittance of an orchestra—perhaps an undeserving title for the violin and piano employed in the pit. Not one evening did the full orchestra promised in the advertisements appear.[99] A concession was published in the *News*, which stated that the spring rainstorms had washed away a railway bridge south of Cheyenne during their travels. Oates, having been informed that the train would not arrive in Denver for their opening, made the decision to leave behind part of her troupe, and take only the necessary players. A testament to Oates's pluckiness, she led the troupe over the river and on toward Denver by coach: "Returning to the car door she sang out in that melodious voice of hers: 'I say, if we don't get over this bridge right off, we're busted wide open.'"[100] On the other hand, when the final showing of

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[97] Relatively equivalent to US$(2017)40,000.

[98] Office of Federal Coordinator of Transportation, "Historical Review of Average Railway Fare," in *Passenger Traffic Report* (Washington, DC: 1935), 146.

[99] The touring violinist and pianist of the company were described in *RMN*, 25 May 1876, 4; the *News* wondered if the rest of the orchestra had been left behind: "Not but what these instruments were in capable hands, but it somehow made one think that a part of the troupe had been left behind, on account the high water or other causes."

[100] *RMN*, 30 May 1876, 4.

Grand Duchesse might have been reviewed, the *News* printed an extensive obituary for rival soprano Julia Matthews. The English-born opera bouffe singer had passed away in St. Louis the week before. Matthews never performed in Denver, nor had she announced that her present tour would venture there. Nevertheless, her death was mourned by the local press to the neglect of recognizing Oates's departure. To add insult to injury, the closing statement was unapologetically boorish: "[Matthews] was especially fine as the heroine in *The Grand Duchess* and *Giroflé-Girofla*. In these roles she was pronounced superior to Mrs. Oates."[101] Whoever could have made such a pronouncement is unclear, and we might hope that Oates did not see the report before she left that morning.

Nevertheless, Alice Oates remained a favorite among Denver's audiences despite what critics had to say, and appeared again in 1879 at the Forrester Opera House and at the Tabor Grand Opera House after its opening in 1882. An artist whose obituary later recalled that she "enjoyed marked favor with those that like burlesque and rough-and-ready comic opera," Oates and her company perpetuated an interest in Denver of hearing opera in English. Other troupes would benefit from their hard-won successes, which it must be acknowledged were achieved against the challenges and limitations of performing in young western cities, although it would be more than a year before another troupe of reputation came along.[102]

Caroline Richings (1827–1882), the catalyst of the English-language opera renaissance in America and an unflinching impresario, also visited Denver with her Grand English Opera

[101] *RMN*, 28 May 1876, 4.

[102] *The New York Mirror Annual and Directory of the Theatrical Profession for 1888*, ed. Harrison Grey Fiske, 120.

Company during the period before the city could properly support an opera market.[103] Word of Richings and her company's arrival in Denver began circulating in the press weeks beforehand. The Richings-Bernard Grand English Opera Company had spent much of the spring of 1877 in Missouri, and the St. Louis *Republican* was especially enthusiastic in their estimation of the soprano, which they shared in a special report to Denver: "for the production of the English opera [the Richings-Bernard troupe] has no rival and stands alone in the splendid reputation it has achieved in the past few years." Now, the troupe was preparing for a tour of the American West to include "all the considerable towns, many of which have not yet heard the warblings of the lyric voice."[104] Of course, this was not the first such company to include Denver in their itinerary, but Caroline Richings was of a class of American singer that had yet to appear on western boards. Improvements in railway travel were largely to thank, but also the ever-increasing competition between English-language opera companies active in the eastern half of the continent. The Richings-Bernard troupe gave two different seasons of opera in July 1877 and January 1878. The first began on a high note. By the end of the second engagement, however, the company was all but insolvent.

The *News* announced the season of English opera to all "patrons of gracious entertainments" on July 8, and shortly thereafter began running prominent front-page advertisements for the Colorado opera season.[105] In addition to performances in Denver, the

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[103] On the career of Caroline Richings-Bernard and her role in reviving English-language opera, see Preston, *Opera for the People*, esp. ch. 2, "The Renaissance of English-Language Opera in America: Caroline Richings and Euphrosyne Parepa-Rosa."

[104] *RMN*, 10 July 1877, 4. Other stops on Richings-Bernard's spring 1877 tour of the Missouri River Valley included a number of towns of varying sizes in Missouri: St. Joseph, Kansas City, St. Louis, Hannibal and Boonville, and Sedalia, as well as Omaha, Nebraska. With the exception of St. Louis, they stayed in one city for at most two days before moving onto the next; Denver was their second longest planned engagement; Harlan Jennings, "Grand Opera Comes to Denver," *Opera Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (March 1997): 59.

[105] "English Opera in Denver," *RMN*, 8 July 1877, 4.

company planned a tour to nearby Georgetown, Central City, Boulder, and Greeley, before leaving for Cheyenne, Wyoming, and points west.[106] In addition to Richings, her company—though admittedly "something less than the full strength" of its typical size—included a number of well-respected singers who had performed with her for many years: Susanna Lowe (dit Mrs. Henri Drayton), Hattie Moore, Joe Dauphin, Harry Gates, Frank Howard, and William H. Kinross. Kinross alternated singing roles and conducting performances on nights when Richings's husband Pierre Bernard would leave his position in the pit and take the stage.[107] Beginning on July 16, 1877, they were scheduled for four nights at the Guard Hall, offering *Maritana*, *The Bohemian Girl*, *Martha*, and *Il Trovatore* in English. Each opera would be given in its entirety, supported by a company of thirty artists, including a full chorus, and a grand orchestra; or so it was advertised. Tickets were sold at cheaper prices than those offered by Oates's company, and at roughly half the price of Marie Aimée's company in 1872, perhaps owing to the fact that they were performing to a larger house: reserved seats cost $1.50, general admission was $1, and seats in the gallery were 50 cents.[108]

Though the opening performance of *Maritana* went well enough, and Richings received the customary plaudits of "the finest singer ever heard in Denver," the audience was characteristically reserved: Richings "received a hearty encore, as well as a basket of superb flowers," the *News* reported. For the rest of the ensemble, however, there were no gifts, and the audience was not "demonstrative" with its applause. Worried the company might take such a

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[106] Georgetown and Central City were phenomenally wealthy mining towns; Boulder was a hub for farmers and miners working in the north part of the state; Union Colony of Colorado, recently renamed Greeley, was a utopian, agricultural commune founded and promoted by *New York Tribune* editor, Horace Greeley.

[107] *RMN*, 10 July 1877, 4.

[108] A $1 ticket in 1877 would be equivalent to US$(2017)24.10.

response poorly, Richings was assured that this was nothing out of the ordinary for an opening night: "Denver never does go into ecstasies at short notice, and Mrs. B. [Richings] may have thought her welcome somewhat cold and formal."[109]

The true source of the audience's tepidness may have been the orchestra, which was far from the grand ensemble that had been promised: "[*Maritana*] is considered first-class in all operatic circles, and the overture is especially fine when rendered according to the original score. It was written, however, for more (and better) instruments than interpreted it last night. The orchestra was deficient, and its defects were painfully apparent to cultivated ears."[110] The orchestra was comprised partly of a small number of musicians who toured with Richings and knew her starring works well, and other local instrumentalists who filled out the ranks. To have a core ensemble made of professionals supported by local musicians was nothing out of the ordinary. But with the late arrival of the company the same day they opened, and the local instrumentalists' limited experience playing in an opera orchestra, there was apparently not enough time for a proper rehearsal of the two groups together, and much of the opera was sight-read during the performance.

Nevertheless, the scheduled season continued without a hitch, and the performances were said to improve every night. "Good, better, best," read one headline reviewing Flotow's *Martha*, "the greatest musical triumph ever achieved here."[111] Audiences, too, were studying up. Gradually they were refining their ability to critique and appreciate the merit of Richings and her company, which reflected well upon their status as a stylish society: "Indeed, it is a polite thing

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[109] *RMN*, 17 July 1877, 4.

[110] Ibid.

[111] *RMN*, 19 July 1877, 4.

now to go to the opera, and a fashionable person can be fashionable without having seen it with the same success that a Baptist can be a Baptist without the aid of water. . . . In fact, the musical and literary part of the population are giving the week, night and day, to opera."[112] Judging by the full houses and reports, it appears that this enthusiasm also spilled into the streets:

> Hitherto, the reports of the opera have been directed mostly to what transpired within the hall; but it appears no more than justice to pay some little attention to those without, who have only the stars and cotton trees for canopy. Last night, Curtis street, opposite the hall, was filled with a crowd, who, being unable to gain access to the hall, adopted that mode of enjoying the music. The Curtis street audience were on foot, on horseback, in carriages, and on the pickets of Mr. Charles' fence. They were well dressed, orderly, and between the acts did not "go out to see a man."[113]

During *Il Trovatore*, local boys were seen leaning planks up against the Guard Hall so that they could peer in and watch the action. For the people in the streets and those listening from carriages, there was a voluntary commitment to experiencing opera. For those seated in the Guard Hall, they were engaged in validating their identity as "patrons of gracious entertainments."

The morning of the third day of their season, the *News* published two open letters under the heading "The Charms of Music."[114] The first was signed by William Byers, John L. Routt (first governor of Colorado), Dr. Richard G. Buckingham (mayor of Denver), and reportedly "two hundred others." It read in part: "We would beg to tender you a complimentary benefit on the evening of Friday, when, if agreeable, we would respectfully request that the opera of *Fra Diavolo* be presented." Richings was familiar with Auber's opera since the 1840s when it was a

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[112] *Denver Daily Times*, 18 July 1877, 4; quoted in part in Jennings, "Grand Opera Comes to Denver," 60.

[113] *Denver Daily Times*, 20 July 1877, 4. The expression "go out to see a man" is similar to "seeing a man about a horse," a euphemism/apology for one's quick departure to make an illicit appointment, likely gambling or drinking.

[114] *RMN*, 19 July 1877, 4.

standard in the Seguin company's repertory, and had performed it during various seasons with other iterations of her company in Chicago, Boston, and New York.[115] It was not, however, otherwise prepared by members of her company for their tour of the West in 1877. Regardless, Richings replied in an appended letter, stating that she would delay the performances in Georgetown and extend their time in Denver, to "gratefully accept your tender of complimentary benefit on Friday evening, on which occasion the opera of *Fra Diavolo* will be given." The result of performing an opera not in their repertory with two days' notice went about as well as one might imagine.

"A Magnificent Audience and a Mediocre Performance," blazed the headline of the review. Though Richings and Hattie Moore were both letter-perfect in their performances, the others clearly did not know the work well enough, as the voice of the prompter was audible the entire evening. The chorus of carabineers was joined in the finale by members of the local governor's guard, dressed in their finest uniforms; they were unprepared for the cameo role, though their presence no doubt helped bring in the audience.[116] To make matters worse, some "interesting idiot who ought to have been shot" failed to light the jets in the ceiling while the gas remained on. The half-poisoned audience became increasingly humorless as the performance dragged on until midnight, and because they could not light the jets until the gas had dissipated, it also meant that the orchestra played the first act in the dark, making "even worse music than

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[115] For listings of the 1867 season in New York and Boston, see Preston, *Opera for the People*, 96; for the company's 1870 Chicago repertory see Katherine K. Preston, "To the Opera House? The Trials and Tribulations of Operatic Production in Nineteenth-Century America," *Opera Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (January 2007): 56.

[116] It seems that Nate Forrester publicly announced that the guard got in without paying for admission to watch the rest of the performance; it was reported that, before the curtain was even raised, he said as much to the entire audience, a comment for which he was reprimanded the next day: "There was no need to direct attention to the matter at all, as it was clearly nobody's business whether or not they paid to get in under the circumstances. Of course, the management meant well in making the explanation [that Forrester was seeking approval of his benevolence], but it turned out to be a mistake, all the same." *RMN*, 21 July 1877, 4.

usual. . . . The whole performance seemed to be a mistake, as compared with the previous successful entertainments of the troupe."[117]

The word on *Fra Diavolo* from the *News* was defeating and largely sullied the success of their other evenings' work, especially considering that the criticisms continued on for days after their departure. The *News* found the company's lack of familiarity with *Fra Diavolo* virtually unforgivable. Audiences did not care to pay high prices to attend the equivalent of a rehearsal, and Richings should have had higher regard for her audience and reputation "than to appear in in any role with such indifferent support." The review continued: "Her knowledge of the nice judgment and appreciation of Denver audiences should have convinced her that we are not a 'backwoods' people, if we do live in the Rocky Mountains."[118] It is entirely possible that the performance was not as poorly received by most as the press made it out to be. But it was certainly written to make a point: Denverites knew the English-language opera repertory well enough to make a specific request of the star performer, and they expected to be entertained by a performance equivalent to her others, and of the same of the same quality that would be given in any other major city. Although defeating for Richings and her troupe, this was not the last word from them.

Six months later, on January 27, 1878, a correspondent from Cheyenne sent the *News* a special report titled "An Opera Troupe in Trouble." Richings and her troupe arrived in Wyoming the previous week, but only after the railway company withheld their baggage as collateral to settle a $600 debt. Now, having lost more money in Cheyenne with some performances yielding as little as $35 in receipts, the troupe was up against the same odds: "If 'you'se' at Denver want

[117] *RMN*, 21 July 1877, 4.

[118] *RMN*, 22 July 1877, 4.

to hear the troupe in high grade opera, you had better send someone up to-morrow with about $700 to take them out of soak. They are waiting to be bailed out. The principal singers are not on speaking terms." With demands sounding as if they came straight out of the O.K. Corral, some benefactor would have to pay a ransom to get the opera troupe out of hock and back to Denver. Allegedly, Nate Forrester was scheduled to arrive that day in Cheyenne with the necessary funds, but refused to do so in the end.[119]

This sad state of affairs had been ongoing for some time. In Virginia City, Nevada, the previous December, the company had aligned forces with the Croatian soprano Ema Pukšec (dit Ilma De Murska; 1834–1889).[120] Similar to Richings and Bernard, de Murksa and her husband, pianist and violinist John T. Hill, were dealing with dwindling sales during their concert tour of the West. For her appearances with Richings's company, De Murska demanded thirty-five percent of gross receipts; but Richings and Bernard agreed only to pay her share after their forty percent came off the top. It seemed for a while that this arrangement was agreeable to both parties. Eventually, however, De Murska began to demand her terms. Within thirty minutes of curtain times, she would refuse to sing if the receipts were not divided in her favor, and Richings would be forced to acquiesce to her demands; otherwise, the performance would be cancelled. Needless to say, the politics of presenting both Caroline Richings and Ilma De Murska side-by-side strained the already threadbare relations between Richings and the rest of her troupe, and hurt the company irreparably even as they drew better houses.

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[119] *RMN*, 27 January 1878, 4.

[120] The first performance at Virginia City given with De Murska was on 21 December 1877. On De Murska's career in Europe and the United States, see Grove Music Online, s.v. "Murska, Ilma de," by Nada Bezić, https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.07815; Kurt Gänzl, *Victorian Vocalists* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 197–203.

Indeed, a few months earlier in Virginia City it seemed that the company was all but disbanded. Two reports in rival newspapers shared the various perspectives on how the troupe had become so fragmented. Against Bernard and Richings, a humiliating column titled "A Creditors' Chorus" appeared in Virginia City's *Evening Chronicle* on December 27, 1877. It laid out detailed allegations from soloists and members of the ensemble that salaries had not been paid since April, that Richings and Bernard were pleading poverty while still dining well and taking more than their share of the proceeds, and that the company was regularly cancelling performances because they could not agree to terms. Harry Gates, a tenor well-liked by audiences without whom the company could not perform most of its repertory, even went as far as to attach the amount of his unpaid salary to the value of the company's wardrobe. For his own part of the unpaid debt, Frank Howard filed a lawsuit against Bernard in the district court in Virginia City to recover $875 for seven months of alleged unpaid salary. The chorus also made a habit of striking before a performance until Bernard gave them at least a week's wages (less room and board expenses, which only deepened their animosity), and which could only represent a portion of what they were reportedly owed. The *Chronicle* finished its exposé by reporting that in the troupe, there were "no less than eighteen or twenty opera singers to whom Caroline Richings and Pierre Bernard are indebted in amounts ranging from $300 upward."[121]

Pierre Bernard not only responded by having his own account printed the following day in the *Territorial Enterprise*, a column titled "The Wanderings of the Richings-Bernard English Opera Company," but also notified the hotel management immediately upon publication of the

[121] "A Creditors' Chorus," Virginia City *Evening Chronicle*, 27 December 1877, 3. $300 in 1877 would be equivalent to US$(2017)7,240.

troupe's grievances that he no longer planned to cover their room and board.[122] This extensive tour lasted from October 1876 to January 1878, and Bernard claimed that when it began, he had $15,000 to underwrite the costs. From the start, however, "Mr. Gates, Miss Moore, Mr. Dauphin, and others showed that they were nothing but dancing amateurs," and unworthy of appearing alongside Richings.

The troupe that arrived in Denver the second time was a shadow of that which departed the previous summer. Both Bernard and Richings were continually collateralizing jewelry and other personal possessions to pay the debts of the company, and to eke out the fare to get from one place to the next where perhaps their fortune would change. The greater professional costs, however, were disproportionately born by Richings. She used the proceeds from selling opera libretti bearing her name to reclaim her jewels and wardrobe, only to have to part with them again when the company was in trouble. Furthermore, she was forced into the position of sharing the role of prima donna with De Murksa. Bernard praised Richings's fortitude under these circumstances:

> Mr. Bernard says that from the time of starting out, October 1876, up to the present time, Mrs. Bernard has been a faithful and hard worker for the interests of the company, and regrets exceedingly that having made an excellent combination with M'lle De Murska, and when their prospects were so bright for recovering their losses, and paying their people full, all should have terminated in the present troubles. [123]

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[122] "The Wanderings of the Richings-Bernard English Opera Company—All Manner of Ups and Downs—The 'Commonwealth' Established and How it Worked—Opera from the Atlantic to the Pacific," *Territorial Enterprise*, 28 December 1877, 3. Based on both accounts, it appears that in April 1877, Richings and Bernard had entered into a commonwealth contract with the other soloists, whereby "All the receipts were to go to a common purse. The expenses (including the salaries of chorus members) were to be paid, and the remainder to be divided among the six leading members of the company in the following proportion: Sixty per cent to go to Mme. Caroline Richings and her husband, Pierre Bernard; 12 per cent to Harry Gates; 10 per cent to Mr. and Mrs. Kinross; the same to John J. Benitz, and 8 per cent to Hattie Moore."

[123] Virginia City *Territorial Enterprise*, 28 December 1877, 3.

The *News* named De Murska as the reason that the company, though diminished in size, was more artistically excellent. She usurped Leonora in *Il Trovatore* from Richings, who took the part of Azucena. Often, De Murska and Hill would present their own benefit concerts, even scheduling them to conflict with those of Richings-Bernard. Perhaps most bizarrely, however, was the fact that De Murksa sang her starring roles—notably Leonora, Lucia, and Marguerite—in Italian, while the rest of the ensemble, including the other soloists, performed in English. Cohesiveness within the company was of little concern to the international singer, and Richings and Bernard were simply enduring the partnership in hopes that they could make enough to return home.

Richings's company was "particularly unfortunate in their present engagement in this city." The *News* stated in an editorial entitled "An Opera Audience Disinterested," that De Murska took to cancelling any performance in which she appeared with Richings, though they also explained that "the reason was probably that the talented prima donna did not care to sing to so small an audience."[124] De Murska and Hill severed their partnership with Richings-Bernard in a letter to the editor, and immediately began planning concerts with the local Männerchor. When Forrester refused to rent the theater to Richings-Bernard, there was no venue left. A series of benefit performances were given in local churches to help replenish the depleted exchequer, and by February 22, they had raised enough to make it to Colorado Springs and Pueblo where they held more benefits to make up the balance of funds needed. With the last of the company purse, what was left of the company began to limp its way back East.[125]

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[124] "An Opera Audience Disinterested," *RMN*, 6 February 1878, 4.

[125] Following their bankruptcy, Richings and Bernard operated a music conservatory in Baltimore before moving to Richmond, Virginia. Henry Miles briefly describes the benefit concerts and excursions Richings-Bernard gave to raise funds; Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 198–199. On the bankruptcy and final ventures of Caroline Richings, see Preston, *Opera for the People*, 152n181.

This series of unfortunate events for Caroline Richings and her company was followed by the requisite barrage of finger pointing in the press. Time and again, the problem with sustaining interest in opera was directed at the poverty of local theaters, and particularly the management of Nate Forrester, whose rugged social graces left something to be desired for the upper crust of Denver society—especially his willingness to admit prostitutes to seating in the parquette. Forrester was regularly in open conflict with the *News*, who for the better part of 1877 and 1878 refused to publish even paid advertisements for the Forrester Opera House, which eventually turned into a press war between Byers's newspaper and the progressive *Tribune*.[126] And his opera house was as prone to censure as its owner. Simply put, Nate Forrester was an actor turned manager, and did not have the personal financial means or social capital needed to support a house with the necessary philanthropy.

Another push was made in 1879 to support a purpose-built opera house, at a time when no itinerant opera companies were bothering to visit. The *News*, which took full credit for keeping this a topic of conversation among the city's wealthier class, identified the desire of managers (i.e., Nate Forrester) to make a profit as the reason behind the so many failed attempts:

> The pith of the change that we proposed is to get rid of the money-making feature of the house, and to provide a temple dedicated to the promotion of art, and not to the enrichment of its manager and owner. Our city is not large enough to furnish audiences to pay both the house and the actors, if the latter are good ones. The problem then is to furnish a house free, and let the whole receipts at the door go to compensating artists of talent for coming here . . . It is not the building that draws the people or the actors. Money bring the actors here, and the less rent the more money.[127]

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[126] *RMN*, 12 December 1877, 4; on Forrester's years of embattled management of the former Guard Hall, see also Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 199–200.

[127] "A New Opera House," *RMN*, 1 August 1879, 4.

Opera had become a part of the fabric of the city, but not of the caliber that its boosters were demanding. The boom of Denver's flourishing economy accompanied the sound of opera at affordable prices and in the language of the people, but the bust came when support petered out and the risk was too great for traveling troupes.

A five-year operatic drought had followed the Gruenwalds' first performances at the Denver Theater in 1864. Subsequently, beginning in the summer of 1869 through the 1870s, a robust and lasting local operatic culture began to emerge. Opera's increased availability in the American West was aided by the expansion of reliable transportation, as well as the improved image of the city and its willingness to support legitimate theater. Given this expanding market for opera, travelling troupes spent more time in the region to maximize profits, and developed allegiances with venue managers who promised prosperous seasons. Yet, if not for their repertories of predominately English-language operas and opera bouffes sung in English translation, it is likely that these companies and the operatic fervor they generated may not have taken hold in largely middle-class Denver.

The Howsons, a family of musicians experienced in bringing opera to remote outposts, initiated in Denver the custom of performing full operatic works. Their 1869 summer season featured musical-theatrical novelties described (without qualification) as "opera," indicating that the term was freely used to legitimize the artists. Performance of opera bouffes in English were received better than operatic farces, and the Howsons were largely responsible for indoctrinating Denver in the Offenbach craze that continued to define operatic tastes for much of the decade. Enthusiasm for his effervescent music and public prurience permitted by his story lines also met

Marie Aimée's French-language performances of *opéras bouffes*, though Denverites' willingness to sustain foreign-language opera seasons was less certain.

Audiences returned to preferring opera in English when Alice Oates's company visited in 1876. Her season was adversely affected by the limitations of the ageing Denver Theater and its pittance of an orchestra, and led to renewed discussions among city leaders concerning the need for a true opera house. On the other hand, the Richings-Bernard company encountered public disapproval not on account of the limitations of the existing "opera house," the military Guard Hall, but because they underestimated Denverites' ability to judge quality performances. Through the educational efforts of the press and more regular operatic offerings, Denverites were prepared to support English-language opera seasons, and they expected excellence.

Expenses for touring to the American West remained prohibitive for smaller companies, however, and there was still an acute need for a substantial enough theater that could host the larger companies currently on the road that could make a go of Denver. After another effort to publicly fund a new opera house failed in 1879, it was evident that two great obstacles were before Denver if it would shore up its operatic culture: the city was in desperate need of a viable and legitimate opera house with a reputable orchestra, as well as the sustained commitment of a benefactor who could present the best performers of the day at affordable prices, even if their performances came at a certain financial loss. Fortunately for Denver and the growth of its operatic culture, Horace Tabor was already testing such an enterprise in largesse high in the Rocky Mountains near Mount Elbert, in Leadville, Colorado.

CHAPTER THREE

The Boom Years of Opera in Denver: The Tabor Grand Opera House and Professional Opera Companies

The Tabor Grand Opera House was an imposing structure, looming five stories above the southwest corner of G and Curtis Streets in the heart of downtown Denver (Figure 8). In a full-page column describing the building to readers on an imaginary tour of the new landmark, beloved children's poet and humorous essayist Eugene Field defined the exotic structure as "Modified Egyptian Moresque," an epithet it bore in newspapers across the country, relating its "peculiar and fascinating combination of the ancient with the modern in architecture."[1] Field's fanciful reporting evoked the structure's unconventional architectural style—a composite of Second Empire and High Victorian Gothic—and the distinction the new theater, a "temple of the dramatic and musical muses," bestowed on the young metropolis.[2]

As with many theaters built during the late nineteenth century, the Tabor Grand was more than a theater. Retail spaces, professional offices, telegraph and telephone receivers, a printing press, barbershop, wine and cigar rooms, and studios for artists and music teachers profited the building and its owner. In and of itself, the Tabor Grand was a vibrant commercial district within

[1] [Eugene Field], "An Interior View: A Glance at the Auditorium of the Tabor Opera House," *Denver Tribune*, 4 September 1881, 5. Eugene Field (1850–1895), a humorist and children's poet of "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod" fame, served as editor of the *Denver Tribune* from 1880 to 1883, and was a regular commentator on cultural life in the West; he was the son of attorney Roswell Field, who unsuccessfully represented *pro bono* the plaintiff in *Dred Scott v. Sanford* before the Missouri Supreme Court in 1851, five years before Scott's appeal before the U.S. Supreme Court. On Eugene Field's career in Denver see Lewis O. Saum, *Eugene Field and His Age* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 8–36.

[2] Defining Second Empire elements of the architecture included mansard roofs and the rectangular tower at the corner of the façade, while its polychrome stones and variety of textures evinced the High Victorian Gothic style.

a cultural machine, enmeshed in the ideological and social agendas of civic boosterism.[3] It was a building where one could buy a book of stamps, enjoy the finest oysters available in the West (brought "fresh" over land in newfangled refrigerated railcars), and hear Verdi and Wagner alongside Gilbert and Sullivan or local composers William Hunt and Henry Houseley.

Figure 8 Tabor Grand Opera House, exterior. Photographed by Joseph Collier in early 1881 while the building was still under construction. (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, C-210.)

Designed by prominent architect Willoughby J. Edbrooke (1843–1896) and supervised in its construction by his brother Frank E. Edbrooke (1840–1921), the Tabor Grand Opera House was a symbol of elite largesse, bought for the citizens of Denver by Horace Austin Warner Tabor (1830–1899). The building exemplified Denverites' newfound éclat, embodying in its design and ornamentation a collision of historic and modern, mythos and reality. It was the result of years of

[3] The Tabor Grand Opera House was similar in this way to Chicago's Auditorium Building (1889), an "ecosystem for the arts," with various commercial and artistic components that supported ideological and social agendas. My own analysis of the Tabor Grand and its social and cultural programs is indebted to the work of Mark Clague in "Chicago Counterpoint: The Auditorium Theater Building and the Civic Imagination" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2002), as well as Clague, "The Industrial Evolution of the Arts: Chicago's Auditorium Building (1889–) as Cultural Machine," *Opera Quarterly* 22, no. 3-4 (July 2006): 477–511.

local debate over the construction of an opera house, some of which were discussed in the previous chapter, and signaled the closing of a cultural frontier. The Tabor Grand remained for years the home of commercial amusements, being neither solely an institution for high art forged by urban elites, nor a venue where the boundary between art and entertainment was impermeable. Certainly, patronage of the new opera house helped frame an individual's social status, and especially those whose name it bore, but there remained an unresolved tension between the largesse that begot the building and the democratizing appeal it had for Denverites—be they members of the single-tax club that held its meetings there, or members of the amateur operatic societies who danced across its boards.

The theater's patron—Horace Tabor (1830–1899)—embodied an American West success story. As a young man in 1855, Tabor relocated to Riley County, Kansas Territory from Vermont, joining the New England Emigrant Aid Company to help populate the fledgling territory with anti-slavery settlers. In 1859, he arrived in Colorado, being among the first "Fifty-Niners" to arrive and one of the few who stayed after the bonanza at California Gulch had subsided. After years of placer mining and prospecting, he and his wife Augusta opened a general store and post office, and in 1877 organized the incorporation of Leadville, Colorado. The following year he invested his growing fortune in a smelting operation and the acquisition of the fabled Matchless Mine, and was elected lieutenant governor. His rapid ascent in social station and public recognition, fortuitous speculation in the seemingly alchemical production of silver from black ore, and staggering accumulation of wealth earned Tabor the sobriquet "Silver King."[4]

[4] Horace Austin Warner Tabor's biographies are generally a mixture of reminiscences and myths, though among the most authoritative and objective is Duane A. Smith, *Horace Tabor: His Life and the Legend* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1973). At his wealthiest in 1890, it is approximated that Tabor was worth the equivalent of US$(2017)200 million.

Denver's opera house was not his first investment in a public institution that bore his name. In a conspicuous display of public philanthropy, he singlehandedly put up the funds for the three-story Tabor Opera House in Leadville. Built in just one hundred days during the spring of 1879, it was touted as the "largest and best west of the Mississippi."[5] The people of the high-mountain mining town—up to 25,000 in population from just 2,200 three years earlier—thus possessed a theater that expressed their wealth and exceptionalism. Along with other cultural entrepreneurs of the era, Tabor built his theater to affirm his city's newfound urbanity, and his own personal ambitions. The centrality of "Main Street" opera houses was foundational to community building and civic optimism in the United States during the late nineteenth century, and Tabor intended to do the same for Denver when he arrived there later the same year.[6]

The Queen City of the Plains' own Tabor Grand Opera House similarly supplied the young metropolis with the long-sought structure required to make the city a profitable stop for theatrical and opera companies, touring orchestras, comedians, tragedians, and lecturers to visit while traveling between Chicago or St. Louis and San Francisco. Tabor also knew his opera house would be a public forum where he could advertise and cultivate social relationships, especially when a personal invitation to a box near his own aided his political aspirations.

To that end, Tabor spared no expense on the opera house that would bear his name for its eighty-three years. The construction site—now the location of the Denver branch of the Federal Reserve Bank at Sixteenth and Curtis Streets—was purchased in the spring of 1880 at a total cost

[5] Leadville press for the opening of the Tabor Opera House is quoted in Gretchen Scanlon, *A History of Leadville Theater: Opera Houses, Variety Acts and Burlesque Shows* (Mt. Pleasant, SC: The History Press), 7–9.

[6] As demonstrated in Ann Satterthwaite's *Local Glories: Opera Houses on Main Street, Where Art and Community Meet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), small town opera houses, mostly ventures of local patrons, feature distinctly American aspirations of cultural entrepreneurism and civic optimism.

of $57,000, roughly equivalent to $1.5 million in 2017.[7] The expense of building the Tabor Grand Opera House was reported by *The New York Times* shortly after its opening, stating that Tabor's own private investment in "the entire building when completed will cost $400,000. The opera-house proper [the auditorium alone] cost $250,000," or roughly $9.8 million and $6 million in 2017 dollars.[8] At least initially, the price catalyzed the admiration Tabor sought and justified his investment. Across the country the beauty of the structure was extolled, its "polished pillars, glistening mirrors, marble entrances, glistening chandeliers, richly-carved newel posts, massive girders, and pagoda-like arrangement of boxes" being the features that most captured the imagination of readers in Chicago.[9] As the project neared completion sixteen months after groundbreaking, the morning newspaper on Saturday, September 3, 1881, revealed the interior for the first time to its eager patrons with a faint imprint of an etching. Although Joseph Collier had made a handsome photograph of the auditorium's interior (likely the same photograph reproduced as Figure 9), it was admitted that "no engraving, even on steel, would do justice to

[7] One property covering seven lots was bought from A. B. Daniels—"one of Denver's oldest and wealthiest citizens," per his *Denver Tribune* obituary of 10 April 1881—for $41,000 in the spring of 1880, while an adjoining property, bought from Adolph Zadek Salomon for $16,000, covered the remaining two lots on the block. The sites were occupied mostly by framed cottages, with only two two-story brick residences on the block; the need to "replace cottages with an opera house" gives one a sense of Denver's rapid development. This information has been collected from clippings found in the Tabor Scrapbook II, Mss. 614, Horace Austin Warren Tabor Collection, History Colorado (hereafter cited as Tabor Collection, History Colorado). Prior to the complete indexing of the Tabor Collection in the early 2000s, this source was referred to as the "Tabor Blue Scrapbook," distinguishing it from thirteen others found in this massive collection. Generally, historical records and newspapers utilized standard abbreviations or initialisms—such as "A. B. Daniels"—of given names; wherever possible, these have been expanded to full names utilizing Corbett & Ballenger's *Annual Denver City Directory*—as in the case of identifying "A. Z." Salomon's as Adolph Zadek. This detail has profited this study by allowing a more thorough search of indexes and reference works.

[8] *New York Times*, 13 September 1881, 2. It is unclear if this report accounted for the cost of land.

[9] *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 September 1881, 18. *The Tribune* made special note of those individuals from Chicago associated with the decoration of the theater, including the painting firm of J. B. Sullivan & Bro. (James and Michael Sullivan), and Albert H. Dainty, supplier of carpets and draperies from Marshall Field & Co., who "effected his own purchases from all over the world." See the entry on Marshall Field & Co. in *Chicago's First Half Century, 1833–1883* (Chicago: Inter Ocean Publishing Co., 1883; repr., Carlisle, MA: Applewood Books, 2010), 87; as well as the entry on the Sullivan brothers in A. T. Andreas, *History of Chicago from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas Co., 1886), 3:99.

the original, the decorations and the scenery on the stage as shown in the photograph being so full of fine foliage and filigree work that the ink on a newspaper press, even if the engraving were perfect, would be almost sure to blur, and thus spoil the intended effect."[10]

Figure 9 Tabor Grand Opera House, interior photograph by Joseph Collier, 1881. (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, X-24748.)

The decoration of the Tabor Grand Opera House reveals some part of the intentions of its patron, as well as the utility of this institution in a young city that increasingly associated itself with other major cultural centers. Although its opulence has been thoroughly described

[10] *Denver Republican*, 3 September 1881, 1.

elsewhere, one decoration warrants closer consideration through the lens of civic optimism, cultural distinction, and philanthropic largesse.[11]

The interior of the auditorium was painted black with golden floral accents, though a scene from Homer's *Iliad* above the stage stands apart from the otherwise muted pastoral theme of the room (Figure 10). The history painting, a "semi-circular fresco measuring forty-eight by twenty-four feet,"[12] was positioned to draw viewers' attention upward upon entering the auditorium and was viewed best by those seated in the upper gallery.

Figure 10 "Historic painting" in frieze by James Sullivan, 1881. Detail of photograph including frieze and act curtain (discussed later). The legendary bas-relief of Shakespeare is also seen, of which Tabor apocryphally exclaimed when he first saw it, "What the hell did Shakespeare ever do for Denver?" (History Colorado, Hart Research Center, 89.451.2249, detail.)

[11] In addition to Eugene Field's detailed description of the Tabor Grand at the time of its opening, subsequent studies have relayed the opulence of its architecture and decoration, including Dean G. Nichols, "Pioneer Theatres of Denver, Colorado" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1938); Elmer S. Crowley, "The History of the Tabor Grand Opera House" (master's thesis, University of Denver, 1937), 7–50; Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 206.

[12] *Denver Republican*, 3 September 1881, 1. As Crowley noted in his thesis on the Tabor Grand Opera House, the measurements given in the *Republican* are disproportionate to the dimensions of the proscenium opening; he offered instead the dimensions of thirty-two by nineteen feet. After the Tabor Grand was dismantled in 1921 to reconstitute it as a movie palace, Crowley states that the frieze was "carefully removed and is at the present time (1940) in the attic of the State Museum;" see Crowley, "The History of the Tabor Grand Opera House," 34–35. After much investigation, including searching the attic of the former state museum with members of the Colorado capitol building maintenance staff, it is believed that it has since been destroyed.

The frieze, referred to by Eugene Field as a "historic painting," is remarkably wedged between decorative and fine arts in its skill and composition. It shows Hector atop his chariot, prepared to leave Troy for his final confrontation with Achilles, as Andromache lifts their son toward him. Hector is often treated allegorically in art as a defender of culture, and the painting could have reminded patrons—and most importantly those of lower social station who could view it best—of Tabor's munificence. Taken as a conspicuous statement of his political and cultural intentions for the theater, the painting communicated a belief that Tabor was a hero for Denver, and depicted his personal sacrifice and "public spirit" which, according to Field, "made Governor Tabor a benefactor to this New West."[13] If the city was to be a modern Troy, then it would be Tabor who defended Helen and her treasures, bringing peace through commerce and fine arts.[14]

Furthermore, this painting of Hector—another example of ancient and modern colliding in the Tabor Grand—reveals a connection between Denver and other centers of culture, and its aspirations for civically oriented art. Its painter, James Sullivan (b. 1830–?)—a decorative house painter from Chicago—borrowed the image from the French history painter Albert Maignan (1845–1908). Maignan and his art were affiliated with various opera houses in Paris from the 1870s, and he became known in America during the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, during which three of his paintings were exhibited in the public art gallery. This exhibit included a scene he painted of Hector preparing to leave Troy (Figure 11).[15] Basing the frieze on a

[13] *Denver Republican*, 3 September 1881, 1.

[14] As it was the most popular rendering of mythologies in America during the late nineteenth century, attention has been paid to the presentation of Hector in Thomas Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable, or Beauties of Mythology: A New Enlarged and Illustrated Version* (Boston: S. W. Tilton, ca. 1881), 223.

[15] A list of the works by Maignan displayed at the Centennial Exposition is found in United States Centennial Commission, *International Exhibition, 1876: Official Catalogue Department of Art*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Published by John R. Nagle and Co., 1876), 38. His decorative work at the Opéra-Comique was restored and documented in 2012; see Jérôme Deschamps and Pierre-Antoine Gatier, "En 2012, l'Opéra Comique restaure son Grand Foyer," http://www.opera-comique.com/sites/TNOC/files/uploads/documents/263-travaux-lopera-comique-foyer-2012.pdf. It remains unclear how Sullivan came to know the work of Maignan, though the same image did appear in later art

Parisian work manifested a connection to European art traditions, and declared that the Tabor Grand Opera House was on par with the finest institutions in the world.

Figure 11 *The Departure of Hector* by Albert Maignan, c. 1870–1880. (Princeton University Museum of Art, y1962-1.)

A similar statement on Tabor's largesse was made in the physical arrangement of the theater, which at first glance appears to be based upon earlier models, and an emphasis on "popular prices" made Tabor's commitment to democratizing the opera house more than just a politician's promise.(Of course, it is also possible that the arrangement of seats and affordable prices can also be read as Tabor's attempt to maximize profits. Unlike several of its counterparts, however, the Tabor Grand was not formed around an elongated "Golden Horseshoe" of hierarchized boxes.[16] Instead, the seats were arranged on four levels, each accessed by their own plushly decorated foyer, with separate ladies' "retiring rooms" and richly furnished gentlemen's

volumes, including H. A. Guerber, *Myths of Greece and Rome* (New York: American Book, 1893), 322; and Franklin Edson Belden, ed., *Historic Men and Scenes, Portrayed by the Masters* (New York: Werner Co., 1899), 45.

[16] The architectural and sociopolitical orientation of boxes in Italian and Italian-derived theater designs is the subject of Mercedes Viale Ferrero, "Theatrical Spaces and Designers: Spaces and Privilege," in *Opera on Stage*, eds. Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, trans. Kate Singleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 9–12; on the disposition of boxes at the old Metropolitan Opera House in New York City, see Ruth Bereson, *The Operatic State: Cultural Policy and the Opera House* (London: Routledge, 2002), 132–135; and a seating arrangement similar to that of the Tabor Grand Opera House examined in Clague, "Theater Seating and the Auditorium's Social Program," in *Chicago Counterpoint*, 171–177.

smoking rooms on each level (Figures 12 and 13). The floors of each rose gradually toward the back of the auditorium, ensuring that all patrons, regardless of ticket price, would enjoy an unobstructed view of the stage. The orchestra and parquette, totaling six hundred of the fifteen hundred seats, were accessed from the first-floor foyer, and separated by an aisle and balustrade of carved cherry. The "handsome and very comfortable" chairs—supplied by the A. H. Andrews Company of Chicago, which would later outfit New York's old Metropolitan Opera House (1883) and Chicago's Auditorium Theater (1889)—were upholstered in plush crimson velvet, and featured wire hat racks that appealed to the fashionable of Denver: "all gentlemen will have to do will be to stick their silk hats between the wires and enjoy the play in the happy consciousness that nobody is kicking dents in them."[17]

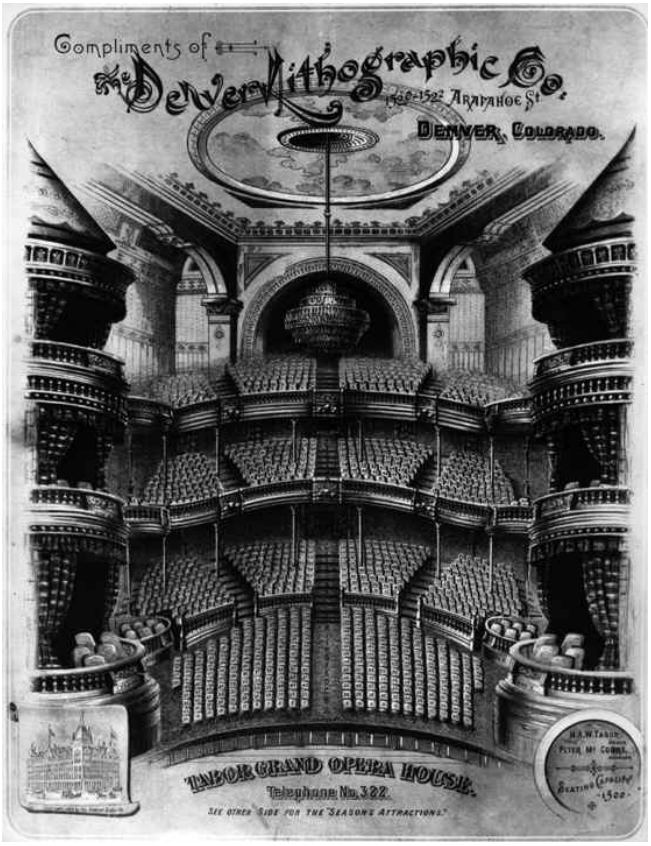

Figure 12 The Tabor Grand Opera House auditorium from the stage. Denver Lithographic Co., c. 1883. (History Colorado, Hart Research Center.)

[17] [Field], "An Interior View," 5.

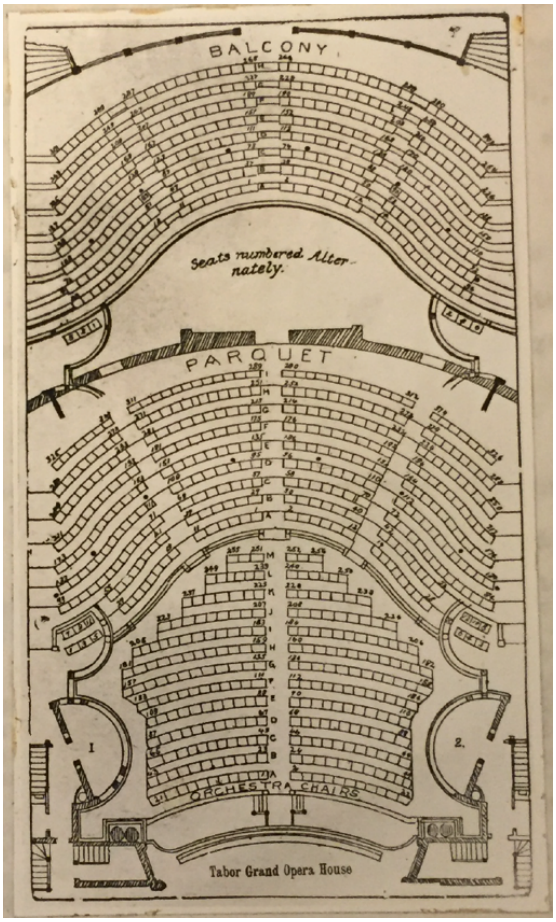

Figure 13 Seating plan of the Tabor Grand Opera House auditorium; appearing in the playbill, *The Play*, 23 November 1891. (History Colorado, Hart Research Center, Theater programs.)

While typically modest prices made even the best seats in the house accessible, high above the orchestra loomed the foremost democratizing space of the Tabor Grand: the gallery, the domain of those who, in Adorno's assessment of theatrical spaces, "shouted, clapped and joined in the performance . . . conspiring to join forces [with those on the stage] against those in between."[18] Miners, smelters, manual laborers, ethnic minorities, immigrants, and students peopled the gallery, prepared to cast their objections upon the rest of the theater, or to receive absolution on those Sundays when the Tabor Grand doubled as a worship venue.[19]

[18] Theodor W. Adorno, "The Natural History of the Theatre," in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1992), 67–69.

[19] A statement on the use of the theater as an ecumenical and political space was offered in print shortly before its opening: "The Tabor Grand has an advantage over nearly every theater in the country in that it is not necessary to

The gallery of the Tabor Grand was the prized domain of those who occupied it. It was furnished with three hundred Andrews seats as luxurious as those on the lower levels, and these patrons, rather remarkably, enjoyed their own separate foyer and retiring rooms, amenities for the working class that may be unique in late nineteenth-century American theaters. Though Eugene Field quipped about many of the theater's eccentricities, he observed that great costs could have been saved if cheaper materials were used in the gallery, the "nooks and corners of the theater," that the quality materials used were "the more wonderful and the more commendable when the disposition of this Western country to make a false show is considered."[20] Nevertheless, the sides of the gallery were covered with reproductions of Beauvais's tapestries, made by the same firm that furnished Tabor's own box (number two in Figure 13 above) with reproductions of "the famous Louis XIV tapestry in the palace of Fontainebleau."[21] Field said the gallery and its inhabitants were a cut above those in most theaters, especially in New York "where the floor is often dangerously slippery with tobacco juice, which the 'gods' take delight in dexterously squirting at each other."[22] The overall effect of the decoration and its instruction was not lost on its patrons. The *Republican* made a point of coaching "the boys" in the gallery to act appropriately while in attendance at the Tabor Grand:

> That the boys of the gallery will have about the grandest sight of the house, if not of the stage, is a point that is of great advantage—to the boys! They will have [the finest] carpet, carved cherry pillars and banisters, fine fresco work, and other

---

illuminate it in the daytime, if so desired. Light is admitted through two large windows of cathedral stained glass, one on the north side and the other on the east side, up in the amphitheater . . . Conventions and meetings may not only be held there, but it is said Governor Tabor has a plan for uniting the stage more closely with the church, which may bring the Opera house into use in the daytime. The Governor's idea is to throw the house OPEN ON SUNDAY and invite the different divine of the city to preach there in the afternoon." [Field], "An Interior View," 5.

[20] Ibid.

[21] *RMN*, 6 September 1881. The tapestries hanging in the Tabor Grand were said to have been specially imported from France by Mr. Dainty of Marshall Field and Company.

[22] [Field], "An Interior View," 5.

things in keeping, and if they do not check their propensity to destroy it will be proof positive of the incorrigibility of the scamps.[23]

In more ways than its appearance and the constrained comportment of its patrons, the opera house was far removed from the city's territorial theaters and saloons. The Tabor Grand—which had emerged out of a relatively egalitarian example of philanthropy—manifested the increasingly self-conscious class formation of Denver as it was recognized as a major industrial and economic center. However, though social distance was maintained between those in the gallery and the boxes, the space was not exclusionary. The Tabor Grand Opera House reflected they city's democratic spirit in terms of who attended the opera, what kind of entertainments they patronized and at what cost, and in the voluntary associations that would come to use the stage for their own benefit. Horace Tabor's vision for the theater as a place of entertainment and social display was affirmed and enriched by the many ways the people of Denver engaged each other, their citizenship, and culture in this new space symbolizing the city's arrival as a metropolis.

Inaugurating the Tabor Grand "For the People": Emma Abbott in Denver

Tabor and Abbott

The opera house–a union grand
Of capital and labor
Long will the stately structure stand
A monument to Tabor!

And as to Emma, never will
Our citizens cease lovin' her;
While time lasts shall her name be linked
With that of the ex-Governor!

Because of its grand opera house
Our city's much elated;
And happy is the town that Em[ma]'
The structure dedicated.

[23] *Denver Republican*, 3 September 1881, 1.

For many a year and many a year
Our folks will have the habit
Of lauding that illustrious pair–
Tabor and Emma Abbott![24]

To inaugurate the Tabor Grand, performers were sought who could provide a legitimate repertory affirming its status, and who could connect with its spirted, independent patrons. In the months before the opening, it was commonplace for the management to announce weekly updates to the roster of performers contracted to take the stage. The *Tribune* reported as early as July 24, 1881, that the Emma Abbott Grand English Opera Company had beat the competition, and was scheduled for a two-week engagement to open the opera house: "The number of 'stars' who wanted to 'open' the theater was simply startling . . . but [the management] wanted to give the opera house the biggest boom possible and accordingly loaded their guns for big game."[25] The marketing of Abbott as "the people's prima donna," her populist translations of continental repertory and superb presentation of English light opera, and the fact that she opened some thirty opera houses around the country endeared her to Denver's audiences, lending weight to the selection of her company for the inauguration of the Tabor Grand.

Soprano Emma Abbott (1849–1891) was a proud Illinois daughter, and therefore suitably western, and she definitely fit the bill as a charismatic performer often described as plucky (Figure 14).[26] She was a prodigious performer, with a wide array of comic and serious, light and

[24] *Denver Tribune*, 8 September 1881, 4; Eugene Field (attr. R.CW. Woodbury), *A Little Book of Tribune Verse: A Number of Hitherto Uncollected Poems, Grave and Gay* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap), 196.

[25] *Denver Tribune*, 24 July 1881, 8.

[26] This examination of Emma Abbott, and the broader discussion of the democratizing value of opera in the vernacular that surrounds her work, are indebted to the research of Katherine K. Preston, who graciously allowed me the opportunity to review the pertinent chapters in manuscript before the publication of her work, *Opera for the People: English-Language Opera and Women Managers in Late 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). On Abbott, see especially Preston, *Opera for the People*, 311–409; also Katherine K. Preston, "'The People's Prima Donna': Emma Abbott and Opera for the People," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 13, no. 1 (Jan. 2014): 56–79.

grand roles in her voice. Between 1879 and 1891, she led one of the most successful English-language opera companies active in the United States. She was also an artist who spent much of her career cultivating a familiarity with middle-class American audiences. To that end, Abbott's repertoire included comic operas and English-language versions of many standard works from the continental repertory. She took advantage of the affection audiences felt toward American musicians, produced opera in English as a patriotic duty, and broke with her own European affiliations to appear more relatable.[27] On account of her artistry, magnetism, and heartland persona, Abbott remained Denver's favorite prima donna, performing there five times between 1881 and her death in 1891. Though it was never argued that she had the best voice, she always gave audiences what they wanted, and a closer examination of her reception in Denver provides insight on that audience's musical-theatrical taste and values.

The tales of Horace Tabor, his Grand Opera House, and Emma Abbott have always been inseparable, as the ode at the outset of this section alludes. Abbott and her company arrived in Denver on September 3, 1881, two days before the scheduled opening of the opera house. A journalist from the *Tribune*, presumably Field, met the train east of the city, and boarded to interview Abbott and her company in their private Pullman cars. He found the company busy at

[27] Critical debates continued during Abbott's career about performing opera in the original language or vernacular translations, and how that decision shaped the reception of a work and its performers—especially their "Americanness." Kristen Turner has brought to light much contemporary discourse surrounding English-language opera and its importance to creating a national musical culture. Quoting *Harper's* political editor George William Curtis, English-language opera represented "another warble of American independence. Ever since our declaration of political independence we have been asserting it in other forms and relations, until this last and most melodious protest, which is the latest proof that [we have] come of age." Writing in 1886, he argued that opera in English would encourage the "development of an American artistic style," establish opera as a democratic form of entertainment, and diminish the reliance of American theater on European musicians and works; see [George William Curtis], "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 72, no. 432 (May 1886): 970. Stated succinctly, Turner's work has revealed that "Critics identified foreign-language grand opera as a high art, suitable primarily for the upper class and educated listeners. In contrast, writers viewed the same operas sung in English as entertainment for a middle-class audience who wished to enjoy opera in the vernacular performed by American singers." See Kristen M. Turner, "Opera in English: Class and Culture in America, 1878–1910" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015).

play, except for Abbott who was dutifully studying a musical score. Their week-long journey from New York had been harrowing; they told stories of a failed attack by robbers, and sleepless nights spent protecting jewels and fine linens. Abbott, for her part, spoke with the poise and clarity for which she was known; she answered questions and made conversation with a poetic flair that Field said brought tears to his eyes. She quashed untoward rumors regarding the Sunday rehearsal they would have the following morning: "Miss Abbott, as well as many members of her company, is scrupulously opposed to Sunday rehearsals, but in this instance, it is a necessity." For someone who was known to go straight from the station to church when she arrived in a new city on Sunday, this was an important part of her reputation to uphold. The company took their rooms at the Windsor Hotel, another of Tabor's businesses, and required ten carriages to cart more than fifty trunks—twenty-nine of which were reportedly Abbott's alone.[28]

Figure 14 Portrait of soprano Emma Abbott, by Mora Photography, c. 1885. (Art File A131 no.1, Folger Digital Image Collection.)

[28] "Arrived: The Emma Abbott Grand English Opera Company," *Denver Tribune*, 4 September 1881, 3.

The Emma Abbott Grand English Opera Company was contracted for a two-week engagement between September 5 and September 17, scheduled for fourteen performances in total—each of which was given in English, several utilizing translations prepared by Abbott herself.[29] They presented nine works, including *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Il trovatore*, *Faust*, and *Chimes of Normandy*, as well as two performances each of *Martha, Olivette*, *Fra Diavolo*, and *The Bohemian Girl*. On the second Friday of their season, they premiered Abbott's newest translation, an adaptation of Verdi's *La traviata* titled *Cecilia's Love; or A Woman's Sacrifice*.[30] Reported conversations with her advance agent suggest that certain promises were made for Abbott to open the house, and allowing the company to present this moralized retelling of Violetta—which had received much press and criticism outside of Denver before it premiered—was one of them.[31] Furthermore, Denver was also an unknown market for Abbott, and she had a large company to support, not to mention a season of twenty-six works in repertory.[32] In the end, however, the offer of twenty thousand dollars for this two-week engagement met with her

[29] The texts for Abbott's translations and adaptations are preserved in *The Emma Abbott Libretto and Parlor Pianist*, a circular printed for each work performed by the Emma Abbott Grand English Opera Company. These—the only "correct and authorized" versions of the company's libretti—included the English-translations and solo piano arrangements of three to four musical themes from the opera. They were printed in New York City by various publishers and ticket offices. No single collection is intact, but they are found in many archives—notably History Colorado and the Tams-Witmark Collection at the Mill Music Library in the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

[30] There were also two performances of *Olivette* and *Chimes of Normandy* with the secondary soprano Julie Rosewald in the lead role, relieving Abbott from a remarkably taxing performance schedule. Julie Rosewald (1847–1906) joined this Emma Abbott Grand English Opera Company in fall 1880. See Judith S. Pinnolis, "'Cantor Soprano' Julie Rosewald: The Musical Career of a Jewish American 'New Woman,'" *American Jewish Archives Journal* 62, no. 2 (2010): 1–53. Denver audiences loved her; "Emma, make room for your auntie, Julie!" read one of the special features on the secondary soprano; *Denver Tribune*, September 8, 1881, 4.

[31] *Denver Tribune*, 24 July 1881, 8. The *Chicago Tribune* printed a prospectus for the company's season, indicating additions to Abbott's standard repertory, and announced that the company would "begin their season in Denver, Colo. on Sept. 5. They open the new Tabor Opera-House, just completed by Gov. Tabor at a cost of half a million dollars." "Music," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 August 1881, 9. The premiere of *Cecilia's Love* was initially billed to take place on Friday, 9 September 1881, but *Martha* was performed that day instead, and the first performance of the new adaptation moved to the following week. "Amusements," *Denver Times*, 9 September 1881, 4.

[32] On the company's repertory over the years, see Preston, *Opera for the People*, 384–387.

approval, and publicity began straightaway. As money was really no object (and it was fully admitted that the season would not see a profit), Tabor's securing of such a fine artist to grace the stage for the theater's opening was believed to demonstrate "the possibility and practicability of giving as fine an entertainment in every respect in Denver as can be given in New York City."[33] Never mind the fact that, according to playwright Albert Thomas, fashionable New York was never "ready for grand opera in English under any conditions."[34]

Placing the price of admission to hear Abbott "within the reach of everyone," as their advertisements read, was a professed concern both for the company and Tabor. On August 21, 1881, the *News* printed a special notice regarding ticket prices, which had only recently been established. Parquette and dress circle tickets could be reserved ahead of time for $2, family circle for $1.50, and balcony places for $1. In 2017 equivalencies, these single-ticket prices are roughly $50 for seating on the main floor, $37 in the family circle—labeled "balcony" in the postdated image shown in Figure 13—and $25 for a place in the gallery. Considering that this was the opera house's opening season, tickets were reported to be marginally inflated over the standard rates audiences could expect to see in the future. The notice also included information on reserving a spot on the excursion trains coming from other regional hubs, spanning the state from Leadville to Fort Collins and as far as Cheyenne. In response to the accessible prices and the efforts to bring audiences from around the state to celebrate the Tabor Grand's opening, the *News* philosophized that what the owner and managers of the opera house created in terms of an

[33] *Denver Tribune*, 24 July 1881, 8.

[34] A. E. Thomas, "A Strictly American Manager," *Leslie's Monthly Magazine* (January 1905): 304; quoted in Turner, "Opera in English: Class and Culture in America," 64.

edifice to art had more importantly "endeared them to the people by the popularity of the prices and have shown by this act that the house is for the city and not for a select few."[35]

"Popular" prices meant that the cost of attending the opera was similar to that of other entertainments, such as variety and comedy shows, concerts, and spoken plays. Opera in the vernacular and especially lighter, comic repertory was still intellectually engaging and part of mainstream popular culture, and as such it could compete with other forms of entertainment when offered with popular prices. Certainly, there were Denverites who made attending the theater a regular part of their social affairs, but enticing them to the opera did require that it be well advertised, have a sense of novelty and refinement, and be financially possible. Comparing the cost of admission to Abbott's performances against other performances offered at the Tabor Grand in late 1881 demonstrates that, although costlier than other events, it was not exorbitant (see Table 1). Granted, these prices would be cost-prohibitive if a middle-class worker wanted to attend each of the nine shows offered; but for the average operagoer attending one or maybe two performances, the cost was well within the typical outlay expected to attend a cultural event.

Table 1 Ticket price comparison across performances of English-language opera (Abbott and Melville companies), a solo classical music concert (Joseffy), a spoken play (Ideal *Uncle Tom's Cabin* company), and a character/low comedy (Joslin).[36]

	Abbott English Grand Opera (9/5/1881)	**Emilie Melville English Opera (9/26/1881)**	**Rafael Joseffy, piano (11/7/1881)**	**Anthony & Ellis Ideal *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (11/18/1881)**	**"Alvin Joslin" Character Comedy Show (12/22/1881)**
Parquette	$2.00	$1.50	$1.50	$1.00	$1.00
Dress Circle	$2.00	$1.50	$1.50	$1.00	$1.00
Balcony	$1.50	$1.00	$1.00	$0.75	$0.75
Family Circle	$1.00	$0.50	$0.50	$0.50	$0.50

[35] *RMN*, 21 August 1881, 1. By comparison, as early as 1860 eastern theaters began to shut out the middle class with prohibitive ticket prices; the balcony seats not sold by subscription at New York's Academy of Music that year went for $3, or US$(2017)81. The price for balcony seats at the New York Academy of Music in 1860 was advertised in the *Evening Post*, 5 October 1860; see also Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music: The New York Music Scene in the Days of George Templeton Strong*, vol. 3, *Repercussions, 1857–1862* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 357.

[36] Prices as advertised in the *RMN* between 21 August 1881 and 21 December 1881. $0.50 = US$(2017)12.40; $1 = US$(2017)24.70; $1.50 = US$(2017)37.10; $2 = US$(2017)49.50.

Of course, opera employed a greater number of production elements, and even if the orchestra was the "house" ensemble and the chorus supplemented by local performers—as was often the case in the early years of the Tabor Grand—it remained the most expensive entertainment to produce. But if Abbott and Tabor could fill the house at cheaper rates than a partial house for an exorbitant fee (as we will see was the case later with Mapleson's company in 1884), then the performance could be a financial success and help perpetuate an image of civic responsibility and philanthropy.

If Emma Abbott truly had concerns about the reception of her inaugural season at the Tabor Grand, then her misgivings were quickly dispelled on opening night. As she entered the theater for the first time, escorted to the stage by Tabor, it was reported that she seized him by the arm, exclaiming "Oh, what a dear, splendid man you were to give these people such a splendid palace! It is perfectly beautiful!" The predictable Colorado rainstorm came down that afternoon, making the streets muddy, but throngs of patrons came regardless, buying out every seat in the house more than three hours before the curtain was raised. Denver's society arrived in carriages, depositing at the marble entrance their "wealth of beauty and chivalry" in elegant finery and full dress. At half past eight o'clock, manager William Bush appeared before the curtain to introduce Abbott, who before the scheduled performance of *Maritana* would offer the mad scene from *Lucia di Lammermoor*, "How sweetly, gently / steals thy voice on my ear."[37]

Following rapturous ovations for her performance, district attorney L. E. Barnum interrupted the proceedings and called Tabor to the stage. He was presented with a golden watch fob, which had been designed by local artisans and paid for by one hundred subscribers as a gesture of their thanks. It was made of three etched panels showing scenes from his life, linked

[37] *Denver Tribune*, 6 September 1881, 4.

together by a ladder symbolizing his clime to fortune and success: his rustic general store at Leadville, the Tabor Block at Larimer & Sixteenth Streets where his political life and civic leadership began, and the Tabor Grand Opera House, his newest contribution to Denver's vibrant cultural life (Figure 15). At the end was suspended a miniature bucket, overflowing with silver and gold, inscribed with his personal motto that captured the republican spirit of Tabor and many of the present patrons: "Labor omnia vincit." In response, Tabor addressed the audience with a speech that foregrounded those of his future (albeit unsuccessful) bids for governor:

> Ladies and Gentlemen. It is sixteen months since I commenced building this opera house. At that time I looked Denver carefully over. I found it a town of great beauty. I found it a city of some 40,000 inhabitants; the finest city of its size on the American continent. It needed an Opera House, and I decided to build one. Here is the Opera House. I shall leave it to your judgment to say whether I have done my duty.[38]

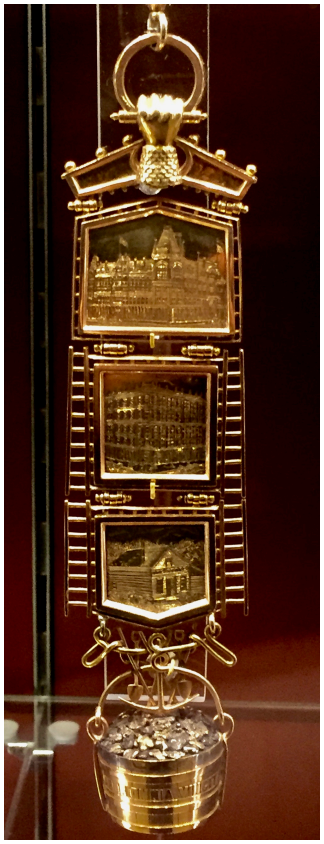

Figure 15 Horace A. W. Tabor Watch Fob. (History Colorado, Hart Research Center, H.1060.1.)

[38] *Denver Republican*, 6 September 1881, 8.

The Tabor Grand Opera House had been successfully inaugurated not as an exclusive luxury for the city's elite, but as a venue that was within the reach of any individual who wished to buy a ticket. One of those was George E. Turner, a young man in 1881 who drove a wagon for hire and made 75 cents a day. He was in the audience that evening, seated in the balcony. His diary entry recalled the evening with Abbott and Tabor exactly as it was reported by the press, and he was even more excited by his chance meeting with Tabor in the lobby following the performance, which included an opportunity to examine the fob. In his diary, Turner kept his program from the opening of the Tabor Grand Opera House as a memento, interlacing it with scraps of music and notes on his violin lessons.[39]

Denver audiences beamed with pride for their new and opulent theater during Emma Abbott's first season at the Tabor Grand, and Abbott and her company accumulated a devoted following. Within minutes of posting "Standing Room Only" placards on September 18, more than three hundred would-be ticket buyers were turned away from her final benefit concert.[40] That evening, garlanded with jewels and arrayed in the festive attire of the heroine in Victor Massé's *Paul and Virginia*, Abbott approached the apron to bid farewell to Denver's audience:

> I feel that I cannot leave Denver without expressing to you my deep gratitude for the generous reception and hearty encouragement you have given me and the artists with whom I have the honor of being associated. When I came here I was charmed by the surpassing loveliness of your opera house. It is a structure that might well be the pride of any city in the world. [Applause.] When you gave me such a warm welcome on my first appearance, I began to love Denver and its people, and now that you have given me such continuous encouragement and been so uniformly kind, I want to tell you that you have won my whole heart, and I hope the day may not be distant when I shall have the pleasure of being with you again.[41]

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[39] George E. Turner, "Monday, September 5, 1881," in *Papers, 1872–1913 [manuscript]*, Denver Public Library, Western History, C Mss. WH415.

[40] *Denver Tribune*, 18 September 1881, 4.

[41] "Farewell Address," *Denver Tribune*, 18 September 1881, 4.

Horace Tabor greeted her with a large star made of tuberoses and geranium, and a harp arranged of cut flowers was presented to her on behalf of the evening's fifteen hundred spectators.[42]

Solidly urban and middle class, the audience applauded Abbott's English-language opera company, praising it as a deeply valued cultural experience. Abbott's season of opera in English was foremost an accessible entertainment, available to any that could afford entry to the Tabor Grand. This audience had been cultivated over the years by a growing number of impresarios and professional traveling troupes who risked wealth and health to bring entertainment and uplift to Denver. And in exchange, Denverites admired those American singers that strove to present an accessible experience through English-language performances. Emma Abbott, the people's prima donna and standard-bearer for opera performed in English translation, would fulfill the promise made in her farewell address by maintaining a ten-year affiliation with Denver and the Tabor Grand Opera House.

Foreign-Language Opera Reception at the Tabor Grand

Owing to its geographic isolation and the market forces of touring the Rocky Mountain region, foreign-language opera performances in Denver were uncommon, and the few exceptions following the opening of the Tabor Grand were highly divisive, even rather unwelcome. It was extremely expensive for opera companies to do business in Denver, and without a theater syndicate or a straight path to San Francisco, financial success was far from certain. On account of their large choruses and orchestras, exorbitantly paid international superstar singers, and the cost to freight properties and costumes, few companies took the risk. The ones that did were Inez Fabbri's Milan Grand Italian Opera Company, based in San Francisco, and Her Majesty's Opera

[42] "The Last Night," *Denver Tribune*, 18 September 1881, 4.

Company under the management of Colonel James Henry Mapleson (1830–1901). Considering the reception of Mapleson's company in Denver casts light on the disapprobation of foreign-language opera in a fiercely independent and largely middle-class city, and an operatic culture ready for the proliferation of English-language opera activity—both professional and amateur.

Her Majesty's Opera Company arrived in New York from London in October 1878. Their presence was regarded as a boon to the opera-loving elite of the city who preferred foreign-language opera—most of which was sung in Italian, regardless of the original language. Mapleson had been assured by the financier and diplomat August Belmont that if he brought to America a "brilliant company with one or two stars of magnitude" he could be "sure of complete success."[43] Mapleson and his constellation of star performers dazzled New York Society with their performances at the Academy of Music for half a decade. Then, with the opening of the Metropolitan Opera in 1883 and its competing Italian season managed by Henry Abbey, Mapleson found that receipts did not meet expenditures, even with Adelina Patti headlining the company.[44] Patti, for that matter, was contracted for a purported fee of $5,000 per performance, to be paid in advance. Mapleson's Academy season, which ran from the summer of 1883 to early January 1884, left him with a debt of at least $24,000.[45] Perhaps to recoup some losses and get away from the competition with the Metropolitan, Mapleson arranged for an eleven-week tour, including Baltimore, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, St. Joseph, Denver, and Cheyenne on the way to Salt Lake City and San Francisco by early March. In addition to Patti, he added the

[43] John Frederick Cone, *First Rival of the Metropolitan Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 4–5.

[44] On the rise of the Metropolitan Opera and the changing tides of foreign-language opera reception, see Preston, *Opera for the People*, 214–227.

[45] Roughly equivalent to US$(2017)619.000; Mapleson's debt paled in comparison to Henry Abbey's from the first season of the Metropolitan Opera, reportedly $600,000, or US$(2017)15 million. See Cone, *First Rival*, 60.

Hungarian soprano Etelka Gerster to his roster to increase the number of performances they could offer while on the road.[46]

When the company arrived at Denver in February 1884, the disparity between the reception of opera in English versus Italian-language performances, as well as the difference in ticket prices between the two, were laid bare in a steady feud between the press, performers, and managers of the opera house. This was initiated in no small part by the *Republican*, the stalwart competitor of Byers's *News* for the better part of the 1880s, whose vilifying of the company helped slow ticket sales. Taking an alleged moral high ground while the other papers demonstrated only a "spasm of virtue," the *Republican* led the charge against Her Majesty's Company and the Tabor Grand, devoting column upon column to the alleged swindling of audiences. This press war culminated in personal attacks on the elaborate and eccentric lifestyles of Patti and Gerster, as well as calls to boycott the opera during their season.

Republican contributors called the prices charged to hear Patti and Gerster outright fraudulent, "robbery without special merit."[47] They dug into communications from other newspapers, precisely reporting out the cost of tickets in New York and St. Louis just weeks before. For example, they stated that at the Academy of Music during January, tickets to a Patti performance cost five dollars in the parquette and three dollars for balcony seats; to a Gerster performance, parquette seats cost three dollars and two dollars for balcony seats.[48] At the Tabor

[46] This is the well-documented tour during which the rivalry with Patti was aggravated when they sang together in Meyerbeer's *Gli Ugonotti* in translation by Manfredo Maggioni—Gerster was Marguerite de Valois, Patti was Valentine. Grove Music Online, s.v. "Gerster, Etelka," by Elizabeth Forbes, https://doi.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.10964.

[47] *Denver Republican*, 27 February 1884, 5.

[48] Comparative prices for the Mapleson season at the Academy of Music are drawn from advertisements for Patti's performance of *Crispino e la comare* in *New York Times*, 4 January 1884, 7; and Gerster's performance of *L'elisir d'amore* in *New York Times*, 9 January 1884, 7. These advertisements corroborate the *Republican*'s investigative reporting in the matter.

Grand Opera House, by comparison, tickets to a Patti performance were advertised at seven dollars for seats in the parquette and six or seven dollars for the balcony; to a Gerster performance, parquette seats cost five dollars and four or five dollars for balcony seats.[49] On average, Denver prices to hear Her Majesty's company were up fifty percent over the New York prices. To make matters worse, it was reported that part of the company's orchestra and chorus remained in St. Louis, and so it was wondered if the ticket prices would be proportionally reduced. This revelation, coupled with the fact that the less costly New York performances were given at what was arguably the most exclusive venue in America, made their presence in a majority middle-class city all the more contemptible.

Denver audiences were accustomed to the popular prices of the English-language troupes, and to a certain cordiality with their prima donnas. Neither of these scenarios was the case with Her Majesty's Company. Lent began that same week, and the press suggested that people would be better off donating their money as penance than spending it on the opera.[50] Furthermore, it was speculated whether Adelina Patti would even arrive in Denver. Reports from St. Louis and Kansas City went back and forth, rumoring for a week that she preferred returning early to New York. The day before their arrival, it was confirmed that Patti was with the party, though she intended to sing only one performance in Denver during their four-day season—a Saturday matinée of *La traviata*. The press cried foul. Season ticket buyers had purchased forty-dollar subscriptions for the company's evening performances only, thereby forcing them to buy another

[49] At the Tabor Grand, the cheapest ticket for a Gerster performance ($2 general admission) was roughly equivalent to US$(2017)51.50; the most expensive ticket for a Patti performance ($7 reserved parquette) was roughly equivalent to US$(2017)180.00. *Denver Republican*, 27 February 1884, 5; see also the pricing table in Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 213.

[50] *RMN*, 27 February 1884, 4.

single ticket if they wanted to hear Patti.[51] The Tabor Grand's management was accused of conspiring with Mapleson to arrange Patti's quiet departure from Missouri and hide it from the press, supposedly to hoodwink investors, and patrons were urged to "steer clear the operatic pirates and their Denver management."[52] To make Patti appear even less forgivable, the *News* printed a very unflattering (alleged) interview with the company's advance agent, Carlo Dittman, titled "Patti's Parrot;" reportedly, Patti had been given a parrot by the emperor of Brazil, which could repeat but one word when guests entered her room: "Cash."[53]

Denver audiences did not typically receive star singers so acrimoniously. Adelina was not the first Patti to have graced Denver's stages, and she certainly was not the most well-received one. Carlotta Patti (1835–1889), Adelina's elder sister, performed years earlier in 1879 at Denver's Turnhalle. Two concerts featured Carlotta with pianist Henry Ketten, her husband and cellist Ernest de Munck, tenor Theodore Toedt, and Italian baritone Ezio Ciampi-Cellaj. The concert included selections from *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Ernani*, and *L'elisir d'amore*, among other continental favorites, all of which were performed in the original language for a polyglot audience.[54] Denver's press glowingly assessed the performances, describing also her audiences as "an assemblage of sovereigns such as the frontier metropolis alone could furnish, blended kings of the carbonates with kings of the roaming herds." La Diva Patti, as Carlotta was known

[51] A ticket to all evening performances given by Mapleson's company was roughly equivalent to US$(2017)1030.

[52] *Denver Republican*, 28 February 1884, 54.

[53] *RMN*, 28 February 1884, 5.

[54] This tour was managed by Charles A. Chizzola. Admission was $1.50 or US$(2017)38.00, with reserved seats available for $2.50 or US$(2017)63.40 from the Knight Brothers and Waterbury's music stores. Ferdinand Dulcken served as accompanist and music director. On the first evening, 19 December 1879, Carlotta offered the cavatina "Una voce poco fa" from *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, either Elvira's "Ernani, Ernani involami" or "Tutto sprezzo che d'Ernani," and "Chiedi all'aura lusinghiera" from *L'elisir d'amore* with Mr. Toedt. On the second night, 20 December, she offered "Caro nome" and trio from *Rigoletto*, Karl Eckert's beloved "Swiss Echo Song" (which Adelina would regularly interpolate in the lesson scene of *Barbiere*), and a selection of Stephen Foster songs.

to admirers, entered the stage on the first evening, draped in a magnificent ensemble and laden with diamonds. What is left unstated in the coverage was Carlotta's disability—a limp caused by either a congenital disorder or a horse-riding accident—which limited her performing in fully staged operas, and has been overemphasized in scholarly literature.[55] Later, critics upbraided the eastern press for frivolous attempts to rate Carlotta's voice against others (especially her sister), stating "the average listener does not care for such classification"—a statement made about Carlotta in a column that was supposed to be about Adelina.[56] Regrettably, portrayals of her as "less than" Adelina have detracted from Carlotta's historical influence on democratizing audiences and disseminating art music in nineteenth-century America.

In addition to Adelina Patti in *La traviata*, the other works produced by Her Majesty's during their 1884 visit included *La sonnambula* and *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Gerster, and the lesser known Louise Dotti as Gilda in *Rigoletto*—though she was reported ill and replaced by Giovanna Bianchi in *La favorita*. All of these performances were given in Italian. On opening night of *La sonnambula* drew a comparatively empty house for the Tabor Grand, though Gerster's performance received the usual plaudits: "the most finished operatic presentation that has ever been given in Denver."[57] The same column speculated that the house drew only twelve hundred dollars in sales, being roughly three hundred dollars shy of her fee for the performance. Similarly, following Patti's rendition of Violetta, Mapleson stated to the *Republican* that "Patti

[55] The most regularly consulted biography of Adelina Patti rather sidelines Carlotta unsympathetically when it states: "[Carlotta] made an unsuccessful debut as Amina at New York's Academy of Music on 22 September 1862, with the disadvantages of a lameness suffered since childhood and a temperament unsympathetic for the stage;" John Frederick Cone, *Adelina Patti: Queen of Hearts* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1993), 66. The review of Carlotta Patti's debut, titled "Carlotta Patti, The Most Successful Debut of Modern Times," suggests that this assessment is spurious at best; see *New York Times*, 23 September 1862, 8.

[56] *Denver Republican*, 28 February 1884, 4.

[57] "Mapleson Not to Blame," *Denver Republican*, 1 March 1884, 4. The *RMN* was silent and reviewed neither of Gerster's performances.

has not sung to such a small audience . . . for twenty years."[58] Though the half-filled house still showed up in the finest fashions, he claimed that the performance yielded only four thousand dollars—not even all of Patti's fee, let alone the other eighty or so involved in the performance.[59] Mapleson was at best barely meeting expenditures when it came to his prima donnas—certainly not what he hoped for with his western tour.

In Mapleson's defense, the press repeatedly absolved him from any involvement in the price gouging. "Mapleson Not to Blame" and "An Impresario's Trials" were each two-column articles run in the *Republican*. As part of the coverage, Mapleson had the opportunity to discuss openly the cost of running the company, which he approximated to be near twenty-five thousand dollars a week, a claim the reporter noted was corroborated against the manager's personal records.[60] In turn, the "failure of the week" was attributed to mismanagement by the Tabor Grand staff and the greed of its owner:

> At New York prices, his troupe could have sung here and made money. The Opera House management knew this, but it was not content with honest profits . . . It is too bad that he must be the heavier loser. The Opera House management, which is more to blame, will lose comparatively little. Its share of the receipts will probably be sufficient to pay for opening the theater.[61]

It was hoped that Mapleson would return with the troupe, and that a season with popular prices could be encouraged. One editorial even went as far as to calculate the potential income from a nearly full house paying "New York prices" to hear Patti in Denver: $7,184.[62] Regardless, the

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[58] *Denver Republican*, 2 March 1884, 4.

[59] The *News* differed in their approximation, indicating that the Tabor Grand had reported receipts of six thousand; *RMN*, 2 March 1884, 1.

[60] "An Impresario's Trials," *Denver Republican*, 2 March 1884, 7. Roughly equivalent to US$(2017) 644,000.

[61] *Denver Republican*, 1 March 1884, 4.

[62] "Discontented and Sad, Such is the Plight of Col. Mapleson," *Denver Republican*, 3 March 1884, 4. Calculated full house is roughly equivalent to US$(2017)185,000, which today is almost unheard of for a single performance.

excessively high prices to see Patti and Gerster continued for the rest of their western tour. After their departure, Denver audiences monitored the activities of the troupe in San Francisco. A riot, which was gleefully reported, broke out at the opera house there. Mapleson was arrested for causing a situation that inhibited access to the building and patrons' safety, and throngs of operagoers smashed windows, demanding that ticket speculators (scalpers) be kept away from the house, and that the prices be lowered.[63] Evidently, Denver audiences were not alone in rejecting the more-than-New York prices of Her Majesty's Opera Company in the West.

The failure of the week also came down to the negative perception of the company's exclusivity. As Katherine Preston has observed, the patronage of foreign-language opera by wealthy Americans allowed them to "demonstrate their own connection with a cosmopolitan world beyond North America," and to employ that worldliness as a marker of exclusivity and wealth.[64] The limited support of middle-class Denverites for Her Majesty's Company suggests their rejection of the exclusive image, as much as the prices, imposed by the Tabor Grand. Elsewhere, the patronage of continental opera in English was used to denigrate middle-class audiences. For example, middle-class New Yorkers attending a performance of Clara Louise Kellogg's English Opera Company in 1874 were described as an "unsophisticated" rabble. They were contrasted with a minority of "musical Patricians" in the audience who were otherwise uninterested in translated opera.[65] After reviewing nearly three decades of editorials and reviews of opera in Denver, however, it can be said that in this case, the "rabble" was the audience, unsophisticated or otherwise. Denverites, like other middle-class opera lovers around the country, rejected the exclusivity now associated with foreign-language opera, contradicting an

[63] "Patti Riot in 'Frisco," *RMN*, 15 March 1884, 1.

[64] Preston, "Opera is Elite / Opera is Nationalist," 536–537.

[65] Karl Merz, *Brainard's Musical World* 11, no. 33 (March 1874): 42; quoted in Preston, *Opera for the People*, 193.

engrained historical stereotype about nineteenth-century American opera audiences. Americans in general preferred in every way the populism of opera in English performed by accessible, affable American prima donnas. English-language performers never received the kinds of criticism heaped upon Mapleson, Gerster, and Patti.

One final apocryphal scene between Mapleson and a local vendor, reported as it were in the *Republican*, exhibits the preferences and authority of Denver's ostensibly middle-class opera patrons, albeit with a humorous twist.

> Scene, lobby of the Windsor Hotel; Time, yesterday afternoon.
> Dramatis personae: J. H. Mapleson, a retired Colonel of Her Majesty's Army, now an impresario; John Smith, a wide-awake newsdealer.
>
> Mapleson—"Give me a New York *Herald*," laying down a coin of the realm, of the value of five cents, commonly called a nickel.
>
> Smith—Here you are, sir; the latest edition, just in from New York.
>
> [Mapleson picks up paper and starts to walk off third entrance right, when Smith calls him.]
>
> Smith—Beg pardon, sir; another nickel, if you please. The Denver price is a dime.
>
> Mapleson—What, sir? Dime, sir? Gad, sir; down-right robbery, sir!
>
> [Mapleson goes down into his pocket for another nickel which he throws upon the counter, where it falls with an outraged twirl and twist.]
>
> Smith—My dear sir, I paid $7 to hear Patti on Saturday afternoon.
>
> [Mapleson puts up paper and walks off third entrance "left" with a dignified stride. Smith winks to himself and looks wise. Ensemble twitters.][66]

In no way should it be construed that Denverites did not enjoy Italian opera; on the contrary, they were ready enthusiasts whenever a troupe appeared to perform Italian opera in English. They did not, however, support Italian opera in Italian, especially when associated with capricious foreign

[66] *Denver Republican*, 4 March 1884, 4.

singers, products of the much-maligned star system, and prices that were inaccessible for most middle and working-class patrons.

Peter McCourt's Silver Circuit and Changing Public Tastes

Given the experience of Henry Mapleson and his star performers, there is little doubt that Denver was a sorry marketplace for foreign-language opera. It is hard to assess who exactly attended the opera in Denver during the late-nineteenth century, but based on press reports and the occasional social column listing recognizable patrons, the typical audience consisted of middle-class professionals and members of the working class—especially if the prices were low or local talent was featured. For either of these groups to spend a significant portion of their income on a performance they could only partly understand was highly improbable, and for two obvious reasons. Implicit classism was likely involved in calculating the exorbitant cost to attend Mapleson's Italian opera season, and in part, that is why it was poorly attended and resentfully received. But more decisively, there was an accessible and uplifting alternative. Caroline Richings-Bernard, Emma Abbott, and Alice Oates and the resounding successes of any number of vernacular opera companies. They appealed to Denver's middle-class audience and demonstrated the sophisticated and intellectual appeal of opera in English, what Kristen Turner has described as "high art at the people's prices."[67] Yet there were mounting challengers to opera's primacy in the city's growing number of art palaces, where popular entertainments were presented with greater frequency in places once considered the domain of legitimate theater. Navigating changes in the public's musical-theatrical tastes and balancing seasons of grand

[67] On uplift and legitimizing the performance of continental opera in English translations, see Turner, "Opera in English: Class and Culture in America, 1878–1910," 43–48.

English opera companies alongside those that produced "lighter" vernacular works, minstrel shows, phantasms, lectures, musical comedies, and plays required a more robust business model.[68]

Concurrent to the public relations debacle of Mapleson's Her Majesty's Opera Company, Tabor was involved in litigation against the opera house's manager, William H. Bush. Employed first by Tabor in Leadville, Bush managed a hotel and the Tabor Opera House, acting also as secret envoy between Tabor and Elizabeth McCourt Doe and an agent provocateur with other mine owners.[69] In 1879, he came to Denver as Tabor's personal secretary, was involved with contracting construction of the opera house, and was named its first manager. By March 1884, their amicable relationship had disintegrated. Tabor sued Bush for twenty-five thousand dollars in sundry debts, including a two thousand-dollar personal embezzlement charge. Around the same time, Tabor was granted a divorce from his first wife Augusta (Bush was called as a "witness" to her infidelity but recanted on the stand), and Tabor married "Baby Doe" in one of the West's most scandalous social coups. Immediately after Mapleson's company departed Denver, Baby Doe's brother, Peter McCourt (1856–1929), was named manager of the opera house.[70] He had no prior experience in theater management, but his allegiance to Tabor and

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[68] On the increased production of "lighter" vernacular works and the more apparent than real decrease in the number of active opera companies, see Preston, "English-Language Opera at the End of the Century," chap. 7 in *Opera for the People*.

[69] Extant letters of intrigue in the Horace Austin Warren Tabor Collection at History Colorado are addressed from William Bush to Horace Tabor, William Harvey Doe (Elizabeth "Baby Doe" Tabor's first husband), Augusta Tabor (Horace Tabor's first wife), and Baby Doe. Several have passages torn out or otherwise destroyed. No doubt the content and state of these letters encourages the theory that Bush was directly involved in a scheme to entrap Augusta in an act of infidelity, thereby giving Tabor reign to divorce her without alimony, and to freely marry Baby Doe. Letters concerning Bush's management of the Tabor Grand and his private dealings with Tabor are found primarily in letters from Mss. 614 (Tabor Collection), Box 1, folders 3–40, History Colorado-Hart Research Library. The Tabors have been the subject of many biographies and local histories, though legend and fact have become almost impossible to disentangle. The most authoritative study of the Tabors is that of Judy Nolte Temple, *Baby Doe Tabor: The Madwoman in the Cabin* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

[70] Peter McCourt first appears listed as manager in the Tabor Grand's program book *The Elite* the week of 17 March 1884; the same was announced in the "provincial" column of the *New York Dramatic Mirror* [*NYDM*], 29 March

shrewd business acumen quickly earned him the reputation of a diplomatic negotiator and friend to many. McCourt operated the Tabor Grand Opera House along with several other Denver theaters for more than forty years. He was the constant in Denver's cultural life even as its crown jewel was foreclosed in the wake of the 1893 crash, and instituted the first theater circuit in the Rocky Mountains to serve a growing amusement-loving population and commercial investors.[71]

Horace Tabor built his opera house as a manifestation of his largesse, expecting it to earn him clout with the citizens he believed would support him in a gubernatorial victory. After three failed runs for the office and with a growing list of creditors calling in their debts, it was necessary that the theater support itself—or maybe even bring in a profit. In the first place, McCourt understood that it made little financial sense for a company to come to Denver. Doing so meant hauling a retinue of travelers from Chicago or St. Louis to Cheyenne to make the connection. And not just the performers, but also their personal belongings and production elements, usually everything required for a season on the road. When a company completed their season in Denver, they had to backtrack to Cheyenne in order to continue their way via the transcontinental railroad to San Francisco. The expenses were simply too great for most troupes to take on, and with only one or maybe two cities to play, the profits too small. As a remedy, McCourt began negotiating with other theater owners to offer more performance dates to a greater number and variety of troupes, small and large. Tabor already owned two of the most

1884, 4. It should be noted that non-New York announcements published in the *Dramatic Mirror* were typically delayed by a week at least.

[71] The career of impresario Peter McCourt has been the subject of little research, though Allen John Adams's dissertation has proven an indispensable reference in laying out the timeline of events to understand the changing market forces in Rocky Mountains culture; see Allen John Adams, "Peter McCourt, Jr. and the Silver Theatrical Circuit, 1889–1910: An Historical and Biographical Study" (PhD diss., University of Utah, 1969). Despite many documents available at History Colorado and an innumerable number of newspaper interviews and travel notices related to McCourt's work, the primary source Adams consulted exclusively was the *New York Dramatic Mirror*. A broader study of variety entertainment in the Rocky Mountain region at the turn of the twentieth century will have to begin with a reappraisal of McCourt and his Silver Circuit.

prestigious venues in the region, so the work of block-booking ensembles to ameliorate the increasing expenses was already possible. The problem remained that many of these theaters were not suited to hosting the scale of opera company currently traversing the country, some of them with upwards of one hundred members.

The first circuit through the Rocky Mountains included the Tabor Grand as its hub, the Colorado Springs Opera House, and the Tabor Opera House in Leadville; on certain occasions, the Central City and Georgetown opera houses were added to the itinerary. A contemporary reporter to a western booster magazine explained the advantages of traveling and performing the circuit thus:

> To realize the advantage to the profession of this arrangement in lieu of the old way of reaching the Pacific Coast, involving the loss of time, let it be stated as a fact, that for instance, Emma Abbott, leaving Denver Monday could be at the Opera House of Colorado Springs Monday night; at the Opera House, Pueblo, Tuesday; Tabor Opera House, Leadville, Wednesday; Wheeler Opera House, Aspen, Thursday; Salt Lake Theatre Friday; Ogden Opera House, Saturday, and leaving Ogden Sunday morning, arrive at San Francisco the following Monday noon.[72]

The number of towns and theaters connected with McCourt's enterprise continued to grow. By December 1888, the *Dramatic Mirror* reported that thirteen theaters were now included (seven in Colorado, four in Utah, and two in Wyoming), assuring troupes three weeks of uninterrupted nightly performance revenue.[73] McCourt and Tabor essentially secured unilateral control of booking and the East-West movement of itinerant theatrical companies through the Rockies. Even in the growing theater district of Denver, which saw the opening of the Academy of Music in December 1883 and the Metropolitan Theater in 1889, McCourt's circuit dictated virtually all

[72] Henry Dudley Teetor, "The Silver Circuit: Or, All the World's a Stage," *Magazine of Western History* 13 (November 1890–April 1891): 740–741.

[73] *NYDM*, 15 December 1888, 11.

of the city's entertainment booking needs.[74] When at last, in February 1889, Salt Lake City acquired an opera house viewed as equal to Denver's, the accumulation of presenting ventures secured by McCourt over the years was deemed complete, and dubbed the "Silver Circuit" (Figure 16).[75]

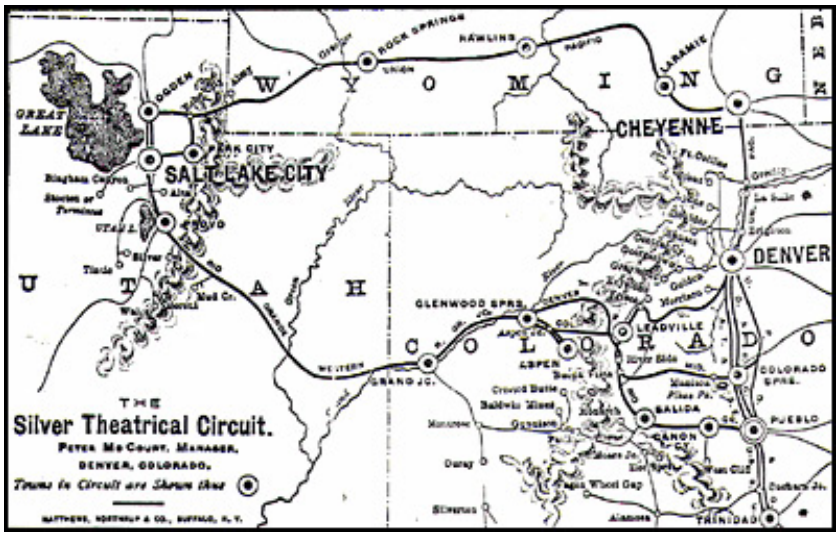

Figure 16 Map showing stops on the Silver Circuit, printed on the company's letterhead, c. 1896. (History Colorado, Hart Research Center, Peter McCourt: manuscript collection, Mss. 409.)

The Silver Circuit's viability was solidified by the ever-growing number of theatrical troupes on the road and the benefits of exceptions to interstate commerce regulations specific to theatrical companies. Now, touring companies were able to reach the Pacific Coast without certain financial loss, and residents of the Rocky Mountain region were afforded a broader and more consistent source of entertainment. A week at the Tabor Grand Opera House alone could yield companies an average of six thousand dollars, according to a theatre industry circular, plus whatever could be earned at smaller circuit cities on the way to Salt Lake City and San

[74] On the growth of Denver's theater district during the 1880s, see Benjamin Draper, "Colorado Theaters, 1859–1969" (PhD diss., University of Denver, 1969).

[75] Allen Adams identified three phases to the development of the Silver Circuit, the first two of which are described briefly here; see Adams, "Peter McCourt, Jr. and the Silver Theatrical Circuit," 21–43.

Francisco.[76] The Silver Circuit was opened in June 1889 by the Belgium-born French actress Hortense Rhéa with performances of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and Victorien Sardou's *A Dangerous Game* (*Nos Bons Villageois*). Within the Circuit's first year, artists to play the Tabor Grand and at least one other theater on the circuit included James O'Neill as Edmond Dantès in his famed tour of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Louis James as *Othello*, the vaudeville duo of Frederick Hallen and Joseph Hart, and W. S. Cleveland's Magnificent Mastodon Minstrels, among many others.[77]

Furthermore, and rather serendipitously, the Interstate Commerce Commission took up in 1889 a review of the regulations affecting traveling theatrical companies. The Act of 1887 had limited railroad companies from offering reduced fares for large groups; the effort was intended to circumvent ticket speculators, but it adversely impacted theatrical companies and other associational organizations of all sizes. For managers who had benefited from discounted pricing to transport companies of as many as a hundred members or more, the sudden imposition of full-priced fares was crippling. The congressman from Illinois, William E. Mason, recommended a fare reduction from three cents to two cents per mile for all associational organizations—including but not limited to theatrical companies—"for the public good that the very best entertainment should be encouraged and given, not only to the largest cities in our country, but to the smaller cities and towns who had heretofore [prior to the Act of 1887] enjoyed first-class entertainments."[78] The amendment was adopted. For an opera company of seventy-five members

[76] *NYDM*, 11 January 1890, 10. Roughly equivalent to US$(2017)167,000.

[77] A partial index of performances given on the Silver Circuit between 1889 and 1909 appears in Adams, "Peter McCourt, Jr. and the Silver Theatrical Circuit," 231–265.

[78] W. E. Mason, "Report no. 2849, Interstate commerce law, amendment of, as to railroad rates to theatrical companies*," Reports of Committees of the House of Representatives for the Fifty-First Congress, 1889–1890* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1891); *An Act to Amend an Act entitled An Act to Regulate Commerce, Statues of the United States of America* XXV, sec. 382, 856 (1889).

traveling three hundred miles a week, they saved roughly $223 or US$(2017)6,200 in weekly personnel transportation costs alone. Although this was a welcome adjustment for opera companies in particular, it just as well benefited other kinds of theatrical entertainment that required fewer performers, making the market for opera even more speculative.

Despite this good fortune, one fact remained that continued to have an adverse effect on opera companies coming to the Rockies: the region had too few substantially sized theaters. Certainly, cultural life in Denver was booming, but it had rapidly outpaced other potential hubs. With the exception of Salt Lake City, Cheyenne, and later Ogden, the towns on the Silver Circuit were small mountain towns, many with populations under six thousand, and few could host large companies in their existing pioneer-era theaters. These were smaller houses than any in Denver, and they really could not effectively host the same companies, especially opera companies with their choruses and orchestras. One option, which was utilized by some of the smaller, less well-known standard light opera repertory companies, was for excursion groups to break off from a full troupe and travel along the Circuit to offer recitals or, more often, sacred Sunday concerts. Such excursions helped offset some part of a company's transit costs, but it was not widely practiced. Although the Silver Circuit was effective for many other kinds of entertainment—and really only met its match for musical-theatrical booking in the West in 1896 with the formation of the Theatrical Syndicate—it did not present a tenable solution for the rising expenses faced by opera companies.[79]

[79] Like the Silver Circuit, the Syndicate also handled primarily comedies, plays, lectures, and musical comedies—works that still incorporated music, but did not require the retinue of technically skilled musicians needed to make an opera company. Booking outside of the Syndicate system was the only way opera companies could arrange venues, but the systems were so demanding that it became increasingly difficult for more than a handful of the largest companies to compete. On the Theatrical Syndicate's effect on opera, see Turner, "Opera in English: Class and Culture in America, 121–124; for more information on the circuit see Andrew Davis, *America's Longest Run: A History of the Walnut Street Theatre* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 182–200.

Furthermore, the theatre-going public's tastes were changing, and prospective audiences found themselves with more disposable income and leisure time. To meet the demands of patrons and capitalize on new preferences in entertainment, more companies offered a greater variety of repertory in a season, including English standards alongside operettas and comic operas commissioned from American composers, but fewer continental, foreign-language operas in translation. This change in operatic tastes was emblematic of a pattern seen across the United States, which led to a heyday during the 1890s for the performance of all varieties of light or comic opera, including those by American composers such as Victor Herbert and Reginald De Koven. However, as the decade progressed, fewer and fewer troupes referred to themselves as "opera companies," largely because this nomenclature had begun to lose its power of legitimacy among middle-class audiences, just as the buildings (like the Tabor Grand Opera House) with OPERA etched into their pediments would with the advent of the motion picture.[80]

This shift in musical-theatrical tastes in Denver is partially exhibited in Table 2, which shows McCourt's Silver Circuit's emerging partiality for "opera"—that is, largely English light and comic opera—companies that presented lighter works, with the performance of continental opera eventually limited to two companies—namely the single appearance of Henry Abbey and Maurice Grau's Grand Italian Opera Company in 1890 (in Italian) and performances by Emma Juch and her company in 1890 and 1891 (in English).

Occasionally, mixed-repertory opera companies presented themselves as distinctive via elaborate marketing ploys to secure a place on the limited market. For example, when Heinrich Conreid's English Comic Opera Company visited Denver in 1889, they competed the day before

[80] For a detailed discussion of this rising popularity in comic and light opera, as well as the companies that toured them across the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, see Preston, *Opera for the People*, 515–516ff.

their opening in a baseball game against a team from the Tabor Grand Opera House, which featured Peter McCourt as shortstop. The final score was six to five, favoring the visiting team. Then in the performance of *King's Fool* itself—which was otherwise considered a weak work by both New York and Denver standards—Conreid interpolated at the intermission between the second and third acts a tournament of ten bouts with the local women's fencing club. After all, associational organizations, the theater, and the pastimes of the middle and professional classes had always been closely linked.[81]

Table 2 Operas presented in Denver by McCourt's Silver Circuit, 1889–1893.

Season	Company	Works	Denver Venue
April 1889	Conreid's English Comic Opera Co.	*King's Fool* (Adolph Muller)	Tabor Grand
June 1889	The Bostonians	*Fatinitza*, *Pygamalion and Galatea* (Thomas?), *Suzette* (Audran), *Poachers* (Offenbach), *Mignon*, *Musketeers* (Varney), *Bohemian Girl*	Tabor Grand
February 1890	Aronson's Comic Opera Co.	*Erminie* (Jakobowski), *Nadjy* (Chassaigne), *Black Hussar* (Millocker)	Metropolitan
February 1890	Abbey and Grau Grand Italian Opera Company (with Patti)	*Semiramide*, *Otello* (Rossini), *Martha*, *Trovatore*	Metropolitan
March 1890	Emma Juch English Grand Opera Co.	*Faust, William Tell*, *Mignon*, *Rigoletto*, *Bohemian Girl, Freischutz*	Metropolitan
April–September 1890 (intermittent)	California Opera Co.	*Said Pasha* (Stahl), *Fra Diavolo*, *Pinafore*, *Olivette*, *Mascot*, *Erminie*, *Mikado*, *Chimes of Normandy*, *Giroflé-Girofla*	Metropolitan
November 1890	Carleton Opera Co.	*Brigands*, *Queen's Lace Handkerchief* (Strauss II), *Nanon* (Genée), *Erminie*	Tabor Grand
August 1890	Emma Juch English Grand Opera Co.	*Carmen*, *Trovatore*, *Huguenots*, *William Tell*, *Lohengrin*, Mignon, *Bohemian Girl*, *Faust, Barber of Seville*, *L'Africaine*	Broadway (inaugural season)
March 1891	Emma Juch English Grand Opera Co.	*Tannhauser*, *Trovatore*, *Lohengrin*, *Faust*, *Flying Dutchman*	Broadway
April 1891	Willard Spenser's Opera Co.	*The Little Tycoon* (Spenser)	Tabor Grand
February 1892	Conreid Comic Opera Co.	*Poor Jonathan* (Millocker), *Indigo* (Strauss II)	Broadway

[81] On Conreid's season at the Tabor Grand, see the amusement columns in *RMN*, 17–19 April 1890, 4.

McCourt's greatest challenge came later that year, in August 1890, when the Broadway Theater opened its doors. The work of William H. Bush (the same spurned by the Tabor family years earlier), the theater was supported by powerful investors and political adversaries of Tabor. It cost two hundred thousand dollars and was located adjacent to the planned site of the Brown Palace Hotel, which Bush also managed. Though not built with as fine a quality of materials as the Tabor Grand, it was still handsomely decorated, with architecture that was "a salute to the orient and the occident." More importantly, however, it seated eighteen hundred, had standing room for another one thousand, and had twice as many retail and professional offices available for rent over the Tabor Grand. McCourt could very well read the writing on the wall, and aligned himself with Bush—to the lifelong loss of his relationship with his sister, and the first crack in the foundation of Tabor's amusement empire, the only thing bearing his name after the silver crash in 1893. The Broadway Theater was inaugurated on August 18, 1890, with a performance of Bizet's *Carmen* by Emma Juch and her English grand opera company, and one week later, her company performed Wagner for Denver.[82]

Western Wagnerism: Emma Juch at Denver's Broadway Theater, 1890–1891

An announcement for Evensong on Sunday, January 30, 1887, at the Unitarian Church included an unusual supplement to the service: Rev. Thomas Van Ness will speak this evening, "Subject: Wagnerian Music; Its Influence in Germany."[83] This was the first of three such presentations given by the minister, which he offered as a fundraiser for the church's planned organ. Unity Church had a substantial music program—from 1884 and 1885, Frank Damrosch

[82] On the opening of the Broadway Theater, see Linscome, "History of Musical Development in Denver," 432–434; Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 222–223.

[83] "Evensong Service," *RMN*, 30 January 1887, 3; also, the announcement in *RMN*, 3 February 1887, 4.

(eldest son of Leopold Damrosch) had been its organist and director of music—and with a choir of at least seventy members, Van Ness's lectures were certainly well attended.[84] Denverites' intellectual endeavor to engage with Wagnerism supports, to an extent, Joseph Horowitz's suspicion that there were American cities beyond New York and Boston where "Wagner intoxicated genteel intellectuals, and Gilded Age housewives, and masses of immigrants."[85]

That a leading member of Denver's clergy introduced this study of Wagner to a heterogenous, affluent and middle-class audience strengthened the rhetorical association between Wagner and the sacred, even in an American city which had yet to fully experience his music. Though Denver had yet to witness a complete work by Wagner, the strains of the "Hail, bright abode" ("Freudig begrüssen") from *Tannhäuser* had been a cornerstone of the Denver Choral Union's repertory since the release of Henry Perkins's English translation by Ditson & Co. in 1876. Otherwise, translated English printings of the libretto of *Tannhäuser*, the first Wagner opera performed in United States, had been available since almost immediately after its American premiere on April 4, 1859, in New York at the Stadt Theatre. Furthermore, the Denver Turnhalle recital of Wagner transcriptions by violinist August Wilhelmj in 1879—three years after he led the violin section at the opening of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus—was regarded as a legendary musical event for the city. Van Ness's article and its twofold indulgence in Old-World sentimentality and nationalism appealed to the intellectuality of his readers, taking part in the democratic and social uplift of Wagnerism that was enveloping cities such as Denver that had robust communities of German descendants.

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[84] On Unity Church Choir and Damrosch, see Linscome, "History of Musical Development in Denver," 289–290.

[85] On "Wagnerism" and the so-called "cult of Wagner" that dominated American culture, especially in New York City, and how American audiences considered his operas were regarded as socially and morally uplifting, see Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); this specific quotation appears on pages 326–327.

After his lectures, Van Ness was invited to paraphrase his findings in a special column printed by the *News*, which affords a glimpse at his exercise to represent the composer, his philosophies, and social and political construction to a satellite audience. "Wagnerian Music" filled almost an entire page, totaling more than three thousand words. Van Ness had reportedly spent the previous August at Bayreuth, and eagerly relayed to his readers awe-inspired details of seeing *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.[86] He surveyed everything from the function of leitmotifs to pedantic variances between Teutonic and Celtic folklore, and commented at length on Wagner's influence on "forming a strong national sentiment." He was particularly moved by the ability of Wagner's music to "satisfy the moral and mental desires" of a like-minded people, and likewise regarded Wagner as a high priest who had "purified art for Germany."[87] As with other American observations on Wagner written during the 1880s and 1890s, the composer's perceived independence and self-made persona underscored, as Burton Peretti has argued, his resemblance to an archetype of American character and self-expression: "willful, optimistic, a molder of great edifices, and a cultural entrepreneur."[88]

Perhaps better than any other American audience, one in the American West—especially in Denver with its omnipresent German population—recognized in Wagner their own likeness,

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[86] Based on the annals of the Festspiele, Van Ness would have heard *Parsifal* and *Tristan und Isolde* if he visited in 1886. *Der Ring* was not produced at Bayreuth between its premiere in 1876 and its twentieth anniversary of its premiere in 1896; "Statistics: The Bayreuth Festival in Figures," https://www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/en/the-festival/statistics/. It is unclear, then, if he is relaying information heard elsewhere about visiting Bayreuth (e.g., Adolf Neuendorff's well-circulated article for the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*), or if he saw another production elsewhere (perhaps Her Majesty's, London in 1882 with Anton Seidl conducting). Van Ness quotes two distinctive phrases, "mezzo recitativo" to describe Wagner's vocal melodies and "music is the handmaid of the libretto" to synthesize "music and drama," both of which suggest one of his sources: William Smith Rockstro, "Opera," in *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. George Grove (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880), esp. "Twentieth Period," 2: 525–528. On Neuendorff's article, see Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater*, 66–68.

[87] "Wagnerian Music," *RMN*, 13 February 1887, 13.

[88] Burton W. Peretti, "Democratic Leitmotivs in the American Reception of Wagner," *19th-Century Music* 13, no. 1 (Summer 1989): 35.

seeing in him the mythos of an upward climbing, independent community of self-starters. This was especially the case after his works were understood in greater depth, thanks in large part to Van Ness's lectures and, eventually, their performance. Although the cult of Wagner was already redefining what opera meant in the United States, the fact remained that it was almost four years before most Denverites heard a complete Wagner opera. That opportunity came shortly after soprano Emma Juch and her English Grand Opera Company opened the Broadway Theater, the Tabor Grand Opera House's first rival, in 1891.

Emma Juch (1860–1939) was born to naturalized American parents of Austro-German descent during a brief period spent by the family in Vienna. After training and making her debut with Mapleson's Her Majesty's Italian Opera Company in 1881, she appeared regularly with Theodore Thomas's Orchestra during its national concert tours in 1884 and 1885, and was a leading soprano in four English-language opera troupes: Jeanette Thurber's ill-fated American Opera Company (January 1886–January 1887), two different companies called the National Opera Company (January–June 1887 and November 1887–April 1888), and her own English Grand Opera Company (October 1889–June 1892).[89] Although Juch had a respectable career, she was not a towering international superstar. She could, however, build the reputation of her company on alliances and her own celebrity that resulted from years of touring across the United States. Ultimately, her ambition did not end at middle-class audiences, and she sought to bring English-language opera within the purview of the elite, doing so with lavish touring productions of novel works that could compete with larger foreign-language companies.

Juch's own opera company was an outgrowth of her work with Thurber, Thomas, and the American Opera Company. Like her predecessors, Juch hoped that her company could attract

[89] Turner, "Opera in English: Class and Culture in America, 1878–1910," 184–186.

intellectuals and serious operagoers by performing exclusively serious or tragic operas in English. The prices to see her perform were thus inflated above the cost of attending the standard comic and light opera fare. Despite Juch's best efforts, however, the music-dramas of Wagner did not generally meet with the success they found in Denver, which was again likely on account of the city's large German population. Rather, as Katherine Preston has shown, most American middle-class audiences were uninterested in Wagner's music-dramas, which is likely why the barnstormer Emma Abbott never programmed an opera by Wagner.[90]

Nevertheless, Juch led one of the largest opera franchises in America between 1889 and 1892, embodied fundamentally conservative, middle-class values, and gave opera to the people in their language. The Emma Juch English Grand Opera Company (EJOC) was considerably larger than other vernacular companies of the time, featuring at its peak between one hundred and one hundred fifty members with an orchestra of up to fifty musicians.[91] Coupling lavish productions with higher prices, Juch attempted to cultivate a reputation with both wealthy (via continental repertory) and middle-class (in English) audiences simultaneously. As Kristen Turner has observed, Juch perpetuated a distinctively American persona, characterized as "an exceptionally hard-working singer, representative of healthy, virtuous, and industrious American womanhood," while also embracing her Austro-German roots on account of the high regard for European musicians, especially among the elite audiences whose support of English-language opera she wanted to cultivate.[92]

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[90] For a discussion of Thurber, Thomas, reception of Wagner's music-dramas, and the American Opera Company and its audiences, see Preston, *Opera for the People*, 440–448.

[91] Kristen Turner has observed that English-language companies typically toured with between sixty and eighty members, with orchestras of about twenty-five people being supplemented with local talent; see Turner, "A Joyous Star-Spangled-Bannerism," 237–238.

[92] Turner, "A Joyous Star-Spangled-Bannerism," 225–229.

Typically, the repertory of the EJOC featured the already canonic operas of the time: *Carmen*, *Il Trovatore*, *The Huguenots*, *Faust*, *William Tell*, *Mignon*, and *The Bohemian Girl*, all of which were presented in Denver in 1890. Juch's decision to include Wagnerian operas on the later seasons of the EJOC, including on this and subsequent tours of the American West, set hers apart from other vernacular companies, and positioned them to be uniquely viewed as morally edifying and intellectually enlightening. In the end, however, it was also likely on account of this overreliance on the Wagner's music-dramas (with too few interested audiences across the country) that Juch's company failed after just three years.

A week after Juch inaugurated the Broadway Theater with Bizet's *Carmen*, the company took up *Lohengrin* on Monday, August 25, 1890.[93] This performance was given in a translation by Natalia Macfarren (née Clarina Thalia Andrae, 1827–1916), whose work was printed as early as 1872 by Novello, with the same piano-vocal score plates and a dual-language libretto with Macfarren's translation appearing from Ditson in time to be sold on the EJOC tour.[94] The company's grand orchestra of forty and fifty-person chorus were conducted by Adolph Neuendorff. As the German-born conductor who led the American premiere of *Lohengrin* on April 3, 1871, at the Stadt Theatre in the Bowery, Neuendorff was chief among the American evangelists for Wagner's new music dramas, and was active not only as a conductor, but also as an impresario and syndicated music journalist with ties to German communities across the

[93] *Lohengrin* had been a part of Juch's repertory since at least 1886, when she sang Elsa with the American Opera Company on 20 January 1886 in New York City; see Turner, "Opera in English: Class and Culture in America, 1878–1910," 197–198.

[94] Richard Wanger, *Lohengrin, A Romantic Opera in Three Acts*, ed. Berthold Tours, trans. Natalia Macfarren (London: Novello, Ewer & Co., [1872]); *Wagner's Opera Lohengrin, Containing the German Text, with an English Translation and the Music of All the Principal Airs* (Boston, Oliver Ditson & Co., 1890). Concordance between use of this translation and Juch's performances was determined by quotations of Macfarren's text given in the reviews.

country.[95] In addition to Juch as Elsa, the cast featured Georgine von Januschowsky—Neuendorff's wife and long-time collaborator—as Ortrud, the Canadian tenor Charles Hedmondt as Lohengrin, Franz Vetta was Henry the Fowler, and Otto Rathjens as Frederick of Telramund.[96]

Diverging from the earlier habits of its critics, the Denver press was less interested in the audience and performers than in the work and its composer. A majority of the review the following day addressed Wagner's philosophies on music and drama, his "species of song," and the origins of Wolfram's epic romance; comments, which like Van Ness's article some years earlier, were drawn largely from the relevant Grove entries. As for the performances, Juch sang Elsa admirably and precisely, Hedmondt was "at his best," and von Januschowsky proved her "artistic quality by excellent attention to details," especially during the second act duet for Ortrud and Elsa. Somewhat unexpectedly, the performance was given in "great completeness," which gainsaid earlier reports that it would be drastically cut. Both the costumes and staging were "magnificent," those used in the procession to the church being especially grand. Neuendorff's orchestra was so large—totaling more than seventy players with the addition of local musicians—that accommodating everyone required removing the first four rows of audience seating. They rendered a "thoroughly spirited" interpretation of Wagner's score. On balance, the performance was a success, and the press reported that it was an authentic performance of Wagner's music-drama, and not one of those "intolerable imitations of Wagnerism."[97]

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[95] Horowitz, *Wagner Nights*, 48–52; on Neuendorff's work as a journalist and his earlier years managing the Germania Theatre, see Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater*, 54–79.

[96] "Amusements, Broadway Theater," *RMN*, 26 August 1890, 5. On Januschowsky, see Koegel, "German American Performers," in *Music in German Immigrant Theater*, 155–159; on Charles Hedmont, see Grove Music Online, s.v. "Hedmont, Charles," by Harold Rosenthal, https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/ 10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O003515.

[97] *RMN*, 26 August 1890, 5.

The Broadway Theater was filled to capacity for *Lohengrin*, even despite the inflated price of tickets ranging from $1.50 for gallery seats to $2.50 for reserved seats in the parquette.[98] Costly opera box parties were hosted for twenty-five dollars a performance and were the social talk of the season; their gentility and fashions were compared to those seen at the opening of the Tabor Grand Opera House a decade earlier. Occupants of the various boxes included the general manager of the Fort Worth and Denver Railway, the owner of a local lumber company, private investment bankers, a pharmacy proprietor, the owner of a railway car repair facility, and the paymaster of the U.S. Army.[99] William Bush attended *Lohengrin* in the company of a large retinue of his amusement loving friends, including William Morse, his business partner and co-manager of the Windsor Hotel; in 1896, the pair would buy out the other shareholders in the Broadway Theater and underwrite the Silver Circuit after Horace Tabor was forced into bankruptcy. Unlike the opening of the Tabor Grand when the boxes were filled with politicians, land speculators, and silver barons, the Broadway welcomed a wider swath of Denver's new elite, particularly those self-made by the growing industrialization of the city, rather than the comparatively "old" mercenaries of the silver boom.

Following the successful inauguration of Denver's second sumptuous entertainment palace, Denver audiences found themselves rather bereft of grand opera for some months. The English baritone William T. Carleton—who had been a principal with D'Oyly Carte's company at the Standard Theatre in New York during the early 1880s—arrived with his company in

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[98] Roughly equivalent to US$(2017)41.70 and US$(2017)69.50; the most expensive boxes were advertised at $25 each night, roughly US$(2017)695. By comparison, the California Opera Company performed Planquette's *Chimes of Normandy* at the Tabor Grand the same evening, with tickets ranging from 25 to 50 cents; see advertisements in *RMN*, 18 August 1890, 3. Compare these prices also with those given in Table 1.

[99] "The Opera Season," *RMN*, 31 August 1890, 10; "Theater and opera parties were among the principal pleasures enjoyed by Denver society people the past week . . . *Lohengrin* was almost as great an event in the social world as the opening of the opera house." Identities of those in identified as box occupants were referenced with their professions as given in Corbett & Ballenger's, *18th Annual Directory of the City of Denver for 1890*.

September 1890 for a week of light opera at the Tabor Grand, offering Offenbach's *The Brigands*, Genée's *Nanon*, Strauss II's *The Queen's Lace Handkerchief*, and Jakobowski's *Erminie*.[100] That these works were not quite "on par" with the grand operas recently produced by Emma Juch was not lost on audiences. Of the week by Carleton, the *News* gave a relatively lukewarm appraisal: "It would appear to be the case that there are too many opera companies in existence and that if several would combine the public would be the gainers. But there are much worse opera companies than the Carleton opera company."[101] Oversaturation of the market was the last thing the Silver Circuit or any of its patrons were prepared to forgive.

Emma Abbott was scheduled for a week at the Tabor Grand in mid-January 1891, but died in Salt Lake City after a short bout of pneumonia on January 5, 1891.[102] The news of her death was received with great surprise and sorrow in Denver. When her mortal remains arrived at the city's Union Station to make the transfer to Cheyenne, a crowd of mourners greeted the company, and saw to the stately presentation of her body and the presentation of tributes for an afternoon while the rest of her crew was treated to a meal by McCourt and Bush at the Windsor Hotel.[103] On Sunday, January 18, Rev. Myron W. Reed of Denver's First Congregational Church offered an evening sermon relating Abbott's character and achievements to those of St. Paul. As it was reported, Reed extolled Abbott's many good qualities, and "especially her life-long

[100] *Delta Independent*, 9 September 1890, 2. On the English light opera company of William T. Carleton, see Preston, *Opera for the People*, 516–521.

[101] *RMN*, 14 September 1890, 21.

[102] The *RMN* of 4 January 1891 carried on p. 23 an advertisement of her upcoming season—which was to include the first Denver performances of Verdi's *The Masked Ball* and Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*—while a special report on p. 2 alerted readers that the great people's prima donna was on her deathbed.

[103] "Emma Abbott Dead," *RMN*, 6 January 1891, 2; "To Her Last Home," *RMN*, 8 January 1891, 6.

devotion to a worthy ambition."[104] That ambition was clearly her unabashed and successful promotion of English-language opera to all cultured corners of late-nineteenth-century America.

Following Abbott's passing, Emma Juch and her company returned to Denver earlier than initially scheduled. Juch and her company opened their second season at the Broadway Theater on March 9, 1891 with *Tannhäuser*. The season, advertised by the *News* as a week of Wagner, was not quite that. Half of the six operas were by the German master, including *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, and *The Flying Dutchman*, sharing the stage with the often-heard *Il Trovatore*, *Faust*, and *Carmen*. Nevertheless, it was well-known which audience would be drawn most fervently to the opera that week:

> This week and next may be termed the operatic season of this Queen City of the Plains. In no other city of equal size can be found more appreciative music-loving people. . . . The attraction of next week, at the Broadway, a series of Wagner performance by the Emma Juch Opera company promises an equally large attendance. Many of our cultivated musical German citizens have already secured seats for the entire repertoire and numerous box parties have been made up.[105]

To show their appreciation for Juch, some of Denver's leading German businessmen honored her with the most perfect Coloradan gift one could receive in the 1890s: a mining and milling company incorporated in her name, the Emma Juch Mining and Milling Company.[106] The appreciation for Juch and her introduction of Wagnerism to the West was not felt only in the German community, however. Seated in the balcony for the performance of *Tannhäuser* on Monday, March 9, 1891, was a twenty-one-year-old Harry Lawrence Freeman, a young baritone and hopeful composer who had recently arrived in the city, and who would in time be recognized by some of America's leading Austro-German conductors as "the colored Wagner."

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[104] The content of Reed's sermon was reported in the *White Pine Cone* from White Pine, CO, 23 January 1891, 2.

[105] "Society Gossip," *RMN*, 8 March 1891, 10.

[106] *RMN*, 29 August 1890, 10.

During the 1880s in Denver, English-language opera and the customs of attending the opera flourished. The opera boom happened largely on account of Horace Tabor, whose lavish theater was built in the city's thriving business district. The sheer value, opulence, and accessibility of the Tabor Grand Opera House demonstrated that he fully appreciated the political power the building could wield. Further endearing the building to its patrons, the Tabor Grand was designed as an exotic and intricate ecosystem of multi-use spaces that helped bankroll the attractions offered in its auditorium. Among the other roles it fulfilled in Denver's daily life, the auditorium hosted religious services illumined by cathedral windows; local political and business groups used it as a meeting place; and because of its adaptability, the Tabor Grand hosted all kinds of staged entertainments, which were almost all affordably priced and marketed toward the middle-class worker. The theatre was thus represented as a democratizing space. The theater's decoration, which Tabor was reportedly involved in planning, furthered the image of its owner as a cultured, philanthropic emissary who acted in the interest of the people and the city's economic development.

English grand opera—that is, translated and often shortened or otherwise adapted popular continental works—were among the Tabor Grand's offerings that audiences eagerly frequented. After inaugurating the house in 1881, Emma Abbott presented subsequent seasons at the Tabor Grand and thus developing an amiable kinship with Denver's opera audiences. Abbott was one of several American prima donnas who earned a reputation as a populist, wholesome performer. Other singers and companies, in turn, benefitted from the following she gathered. One example was Emma Juch, whose performance of Wagner in English became the economic engine of her company's seasons whenever it visited. Denver's extraordinary interest in Wagner was

accompanied by regular coverage of performances around the country and lengthy essays on Wagnerism written by local acolytes show how deep this fondness ran. Wagner's perceived independence and self-made persona resonated with audiences, as did his stories of Teutonic heritage in a community where the German population played a significant role in steering the city's cultural offerings.

On the other hand, the few performances of foreign-language opera seen at the Tabor Grand did not elicit ticket sales, even when the troupes featured stars such as Adelina Patti and Etelka Gerster. Viewed as inaccessible both for the language of performance and the exorbitant cost of tickets, the foreign-language seasons of opera offered by Mapleson's Her Majesty's Opera Company alienated audiences, and created a factious divide between audiences and the managers of the Tabor Grand. Such a rout over foreign-language opera was not unique to Denver, however. Like other middle-class opera lovers across the country, Denverites preferred the populism of opera in English, enjoyed Italian opera only when it was sung in English, and rejected the exclusivity associated with capricious foreign singers, the star system, and its inaccessible prices. At both local and national levels, these facts further contradict an engrained historical stereotype about the elitism of nineteenth-century audiences.

CHAPTER FOUR

Musical Communities and Operatic Citizens of Denver

> *The chief wonder among those present who were familiar with the difficulties to be overcome, was that an amateur company with but limited opportunities for rehearsal should have done so remarkably well with a brand-new comic opera. . . . The opera will be repeated every evening this week, and the amusement lovers of Denver can feel assured that an evening cannot be passed more pleasantly than at the Grand Opera House, listening to the clever lines and bright music of "Brittle Silver."*[1]

On Monday evening, January 23, 1882, fifty amateur singers filled the stage of the Tabor Grand Opera House in a new Colorado-themed operetta*, Brittle Silver*. Little was expected of the work, not to mention its avocational interpreters. Owing to a recent rift among local musicians, time for preparing the piece was limited, and the present club had little combined experience producing opera. Nonetheless, the librettist, composer, singers, and producers studied the model of professionals, and worked to stage a product of amateur craft that was extraordinary and distinctively homegrown. The piece was humble in form yet nuanced in relating Denver's character to its audiences; innovative in what would eventually be termed creative place-making; and rather roguish and subversive with its humor and scrutiny of local politics. Far from being inadequate or shoddy, the premiere of *Brittle Silver* demonstrated the cultural value of craft and communal music-making in a context where such a performance was unpredicted.

In the previous chapters, I have examined Denverites' taste for a variety of operatic performances, as well as civic boosters' advocacy of an operatic culture to de-/refine the

[1] "*Brittle Silver*, First Presentation of Stanley Wood's Comic Opera," *DDT*, 24 January 1882, 4.

reputation of a young city. Now, I examine the experiences of local creators, and specifically, Denver's amateur musicians. In addition to showing how operatic fashions were absorbed and replicated at a local level, this study celebrates musical Denverites who exhibited their collective identity in crafting opera, engaging in their work discussions of local politics, democracy, racial and socioeconomic equity, and their goals for the civic enterprise. For them, opera was a creative medium that generated narratives, affirmed and challenged stereotypes of class and gender, and conveyed a message of accomplishment both to and on behalf of its audiences.

The following chapters argue that Denver's amateur opera singers—artists of different races, professional backgrounds, and social standing—created opera to deepen their sense of pride and affluence, and that opera-making cultivated a community among local performers. Amateur musical societies perpetuated an affinity for opera by producing accessible works, a practice that also benefitted professional troupes by preserving a consistent audience base when professional seasons were scarce. Theater managers recognized the improving talents of amateur opera clubs, and made available to them the spaces and resources needed to organize their activities. Because of the efforts of amateur operatic companies, the Tabor Grand Opera House and the German Turnhalle became spaces where audiences could recognize their neighbors on stage, witnessing some aspect of their own experience translated into lyric theater. Far from being a marginal or haphazard activity, white and African American Denverites wrote their stories into opera to promote their community and a sense of place in the American West.

In two parts, this chapter differentiates performances of "community opera" from original "community-based opera." Both forms of production are located *in* a community of artistic citizens, but they are not similarly *of* the community. As Jan Cohen-Cruz has observed, the former, "community theater" in her study, is rote performance by people who lack a substantive

resonance to the origins and meaning of the work, "who neither generate the material, shape it, work with professional guidance, nor apply it beyond an entertainment frame."[2] Denver's community opera performances are considered through the lens of different presentations of an emerging canonic work, Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*, a piece whose practicalities and argot humor seem, on the surface, comparatively detached from the audience's experience. The performances of *H.M.S. Pinafore* in Denver occurred within months of its opening performances in London, Boston, and San Francisco, and were given in a variety of different arrangements, including a juvenile production and a near-professional production mounted to compete directly with a touring "standard" company. Producers of opera maneuvered their own capital to promote local performers as celebrities, and to generate enthusiasm in the city's avocational culture. For participants, these performances were a learning opportunity as much as a pastime; they educated performers and deepened their love for opera, inspiring them to create original works.

In the second part, we turn to examining community-based opera in Denver. This study is centered on the production of *Brittle Silver*, a previously unexamined comic opera written in 1882 by a local composer and librettist for performance by the Colorado Opera Club at the recently inaugurated Tabor Grand Opera House. *Brittle Silver* imitates common tropes found in other light and comic opera of the era, especially the Savoy operas of Victorian England, but does so with topical humor and scenarios that are distinctively Coloradan. Resonating with the place, its artists, and the lived Western experiences of its creators, *Brittle Silver* presents an opportunity to analyze a community-based performance that expressed collective identity in the guise of comic opera. It connected cultural expression to identity politics, mining labor relations,

[2] Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 1–8.

disputes between classes of owners and toilers, the fragility of land rights, and an American Westernness shared by its performers and viewers.

Where did opera fit in the networks and daily lives of the amateurs who wrote and performed it? Drawing on the work of music education and artivist [artistic activists] philosophers Marissa Silverman and David Elliott, I examine the conceptual framework, value, and, to a degree, the processes of artistic citizenship in Denver's nineteenth-century community of amateur musicians. An area of study that has long been the purview of social philosophers, artistic citizenship considers "the many musical abilities, understandings, and dispositions that people develop" to engage with explicit awareness "the powers that music has to move, bond, heal, empower, and motivate people to act with *an ethical commitment to communal well-being*."[3] Artistic citizenship is neither exclusive nor elitist; it welcomes artists of all ages and races; it is emancipatory in that it refutes work-centered concepts of artistry and embraces creators and participants from all levels of technical accomplishment.[4]

Furthermore, the use of *amateur* herein does not imply a subjective evaluation of these musicians' work as lesser. Though "amateurs" and "professionals" are regularly juxtaposed, this is not intend to make a distinction of value, nor to suggest that professional performers were ultracompetent and that amateurs were not.[5] Rather, *amateur*—derived from the Latin *amare* "to love"— emphasizes that the musicians studied here committed time and creative energy to craft

[3] Marissa Silverman and David Elliott, "Rethinking Community Music as Artistic Citizenship," in *The Oxford Handbook of Community Music*, ed. Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and Lee Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 365–366.

[4] David J. Elliott, Marissa Silverman, Wayne D. Bowman, "Artistic Citizenship: Introduction, Aims, Overview," in *Artistic Citizenship: Artistry, Social Responsibility, and Ethical Praxis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7–8.

[5] On value judgements of amateur theater that have ultimately led to its exclusion from theater historiography, see Claire Cochrane, "The Pervasiveness of the Commonplace: The Historian and Amateur Theatre," *Theatre Research International* 26, no. 3 (October 2001): 233–235.

musical performances and lyric theater not for personal financial gain, but for the love of music and the desire for fellowship.[6] As Stephanie Pitts has suggested, people find value in collective music-making because it is a source of personal approbation, and allows them the opportunity to acquire and demonstrate specialized skills, be enthusiastic about a certain medium or repertory, and respond to a socio-psychological need to create a sense of place.[7] Many amateurs are also keenly aware that a creative experience is not merely about artistic expression, but also aids the economic development of a city and generates well-mannered representations of their civic life. To frequent the opera was one thing; to produce it, however, required quite a different level of enthusiasm for the art and engagement in a community of creators.

Opening the History of Amateur Musicianship in Urban Frontiers

During Denver's pioneer years, community music was dominated largely by tavern troubadours and military bands. As early as 1860, however, the Germania Glee Club marched through the red dusty streets accompanied by a brass band.[8] They led the ninety-five percent male population in singing "Hail, Columbia" and other patriotic tunes to celebrate Independence Day.[9] From their limited newspaper coverage, it appears that this first Teutonic singing society was short lived, though it heralded a successive line of choirs that have formed, flourished,

[6] Amateur activities were occasionally (though not nearly always) an extension of a person's compensated ordinary work and skills, with the "crucial modification that routine was replaced by autonomy and choice." Amateurs pour time and money into their craft "to achieve temporal experiences" and "notional freedom and the essential non-necessity of its undertaking;" see Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 160–161; the question, "Is free time free?," is explored in Stephen Knott, *Amateur Craft: History and Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 89–93.

[7] Stephanie Pitts, *Valuing Musical Participation* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1–12.

[8] Music in Denver's saloons was a topic of interest in Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 1–6.

[9] *RMN*, 4 July 1860, 2; Linscome, *History of Musical Development in Denver*, 126; gender population statistics given in Gail M. Beaton, *Colorado Women: A History* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2012), 28.

failed, and renewed themselves in Denver's sacred and secular spaces to the present day. Using the serious craft of music-making, these groups created and reinforced the collective identity of a local subculture: that of an amateur musical community, which sooner rather than later took an interest in producing opera.[10] An amateur singer's motivation for joining such an organization included seeking fellowship, boosting one's stature and network in the community, cultivating one's musicianship, celebrating national and regional pride—be it Coloradan, German, or American—and maybe even courtship and building business prospects. (Besides, as this practitioner can attest, it is an enjoyable activity.)

Germans were the largest foreign-born group in Denver during the nineteenth century, and the local Turnhalle was a centralizing space for their community and others, including the African American musical and social clubs examined in chapter five.[11] Founding members of this chapter of the Turner movement opened their first hall on Market Street in 1865, which also served as the home of the Männerchor and a concert venue, and was followed in 1889 by a new hall connected to the Tivoli Brewery, which included a large theater with a horse-shoe shaped balcony.[12] The spirit of accomplishment these groups felt was summed up in the armorer chorus "Trompeten schmettert, Trommeln wirbelt drein!" from Wagner's *Rienzi*, which the Denver Männerchor sang to celebrate the opening of the first Turnhalle, a permanent home for music,

[10] Kay Kaufman Shelemay, "Musical Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 349–390.

[11] On the historiography of German singing societies, Männerchors, and the social aims of members and their participation, see Suzanne Gail Snyder, "The 'Maennerchor' Tradition in the United States: A Historical Analysis of its Contribution to American Musical Culture" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1991), 96-139; on such societies in the American West, see Ellen Olsen George, "Singing in San Francisco: Cultivating Choral Music from the Gold Rush to the 1906 Earthquake" (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013); Irving P. Babow, "Secular Singing Societies of European Immigrant Groups in San Francisco" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1954); and specifically on Denver's groups, see Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 35–60.

[12] Thomas J. Noel and Nicholas J. Wharton, *Denver Landmarks and Historic Districts*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016), 53–55.

sport, and fellowship: "Today is the day of our victory! O blessed spirit of cavaliers."[13] Groups such as the Männerchor had fun and built community spirit around their music-making. Over the years, Denver's choral organizations and the amateur operatic enterprises that sprang from them mirrored shifts in the city's society, including changes in its racial and social makeup, as well as a desire on the part of members to use music as a means of differentiating groups with shared interests or backgrounds. For these reasons, the number of amateur choral organizations flourished as Denver's population and the number of distinct communities grew.

In February 1867, a group of twelve to fifteen men and women singers formed the Denver Musical Union, which grew within a fortnight to more than thirty members. Their objectives, as expressed in organizing documents and newspaper bids for prospective members, were the "practice and cultivation of the science of vocal music" by way of weekly rehearsals and diligent training.[14] Their efforts yielded fruit shortly thereafter. On March 19, 1867 they gave a concert performance of George Root's sacred cantata *Daniel; or the Captivity and Restoration*, which was widely available in the church music book Root had compiled with William Bradbury, *The Shawm* (1853), as well as single printings. The concert was deemed a success—especially for the group's president, Benjamin F. Woodward (who was employed as the manager of the local branch of the Pacific Telegraph Company), and for newspaperman and sponsor William Byers, who pointed out that he had "no idea before that there was so much first-class musical talent in the city."[15]

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[13] The musical program and a description of the ceremonial opening of the Turnhalle in 1865 is given in Draper, *Denver Theaters*, 1837–1838.

[14] *RMN*, 5 March 1867. Miles incorrectly states that this organization was a women's only organization; see, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 35.

[15] *RMN*, 20 March 1867, 4; quoted in Linscome, *History of Musical Development in Denver*, 128–129. Though Root is not named as the work's composer, the number and order of the names of characters given in the newspaper correspond with the dramatis personae given in *The Shawm*. Polly H. Carder, *George F. Root, Civil War*

The Musical Union, which operated intermittently over the following year out of the Presbyterian Church, continued to perform a potpourri of excerpts from American and European sacred choral works and popular songs, with operatic music appearing on some programs.[16] There was difficulty keeping members interested, however, on account of a dearth of new sheet music at Frank and Charles McClure's book and stationery store, the Post Office News Depot. (A later iteration of the Knight-McClure Music Company is shown in Figure 17.) Ella Baber-Pathorne—a music educator, pianist, and the first chronicler of Denver's musical history under the pen name Paul Porchea—observed in 1889:

> Even now, in these days of rapid transit, it takes at least forty-eight hours to reach Chicago, the nearest musical center, and musicians cannot always obtain what is needed in that city. . . . Imagine then, what must have been, the worry, anxiety, and the thousand and one draw-backs, when everything was wagoned across the plains, and even a sheet of music was charged freight according to weight.[17]

Beyond pointing out the difficulty of distributing goods in the American West, Baber-Pathorne's reflection on the worry caused by the slow arrival of sheet music, though perhaps exaggerated, does suggest local musicians' eagerness to keep pace with the musical trends happening elsewhere. Still, the Musical Union's repertory returned to amorous glees, and the organization soon disbanded on account of declining membership. As we have also seen in earlier chapters on opera production before the transcontinental railroad and the opening of the Tabor Grand Opera House, despite their best efforts, Denver's amateur musicians were restricted in their efforts to develop a sustainable musical culture by their distance from other major cultural centers.

Songwriter: A Biography (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 52–53. Woodward's vocation is given in Corbett, Hoye & Co., *1873 Directory of the City of Denver* (Denver: Tribune Association).

[16] For example, the program of 20 December 1868 included "Miss King and Mr. Kraig" singing a duet from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*; *RMN* 21 December 1868, 4.

[17] Paul Porchea [Ella Baber-Pathorne], *The Musical History of Colorado* (Denver: Charles Westley, 1889), 141.

Figure 17 Interior of the Knight-McClure Music Co.'s warerooms between 1637 and 1643 Lawrence Street, Denver, 1884. Pianos are in the foreground, brass and string instruments in cabinets, smaller wind instruments in glass cases. (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, X-18866.)

Nevertheless, in 1872, many of the members originally affiliated with the Musical Union reemerged to establish the new Denver Choral Union (DCU). Establishing the DCU was a thorough process, including the filing of formal articles of incorporation with the State of Colorado.[18] Along with local and national press coverage the organization received, these documents demonstrate how a serious avocational musical organization was established in Denver. Though its advocates' confidence in the organization's long-term viability was ultimately misplaced, the Denver Choral Union represented during its time an enthusiastic membership of amateur musicians seeking opportunities to perform and socialize.

On February 19, 1872, Charles McClure—now a teller at the City National Bank, having been bought out of his interest in the bookstore—presented the organizing committee's report to the DCU's membership, which they adopted by unanimous vote to incorporate the organization.

[18] Incorporation Records and Tax Rolls, 21 February 1872, S500, Colorado State Archives, Denver.

Benjamin F. Woodward was voted its first president.[19] Membership dues were set at one dollar for men and 50 cents for women, with sixty members subscribing that first season.[20] This number continued to grow through coeducational representation from each of the city's ten churches. The DCU also welcomed "quite a number of musical people, not identified with any choir or association," representing the DCU's participants range of the pathways and social networks throughout the city.[21] Their first music director was C. W. Sanborn, a miner, lumber and hardware dealer, and proprietor of the Denver Transfer Company. Though not a conservatory-trained musician, Sanborn was well-respected for his musical abilities and charismatic leadership, attested to by his twenty-year tenure as organist at the First Baptist Church. While the DCU's activities were housed in a place of worship (also the Presbyterian Church where the women's Musical Union had met before), it was from the start an ecumenical, non-denominational group. Celebrating the founding of this new musical community, Byers announced on the front page of the *News*: "Such an organization as this has long been needed in Denver, to concentrate and render available the large amount of musical talent in our midst. . . . We have strong hopes that permanent good will result."[22]

This iteration of the Denver Choral Union gave its first concert on May 21, 1872. The program, which was accompanied by a small orchestra and lasted more than two hours, included hymns, anthems, and solo opportunities for the more esteemed members of the group. The Methodist Church was filled by a fashionably dressed audience, which more than once "came very near bursting into an irrepressible cheer." Byers's review was resoundingly enthusiastic,

[19] "Musical Matters in Denver," *RMN*, 20 February 1872, 1.

[20] A $1 membership due in 1872 would be roughly equivalent to US$(2017)20.70.

[21] "Musical Matters in Denver," *RMN*, 20 February 1872, 1.

[22] Ibid.

though his bias for secular ballads and comic pieces was evident, as well as his admiration of one soloist in particular, Miss Fanny (alternatively Fannie) Peters. Miss Peters, who served as second-vice president of the organization, was the sole female music teacher listed in the inaugural city directory the following year and also instructed music courses at Wolfe Hall, a finishing school for young women. She was one of Denver's most capable vocalists, known on this occasion and others for her beloved rendition of "Leise, leise, fromme Weise" from Weber's *Der Freischütz*, which also yielded her an honorary membership in the Männerchor.[23] To close the performance, the whole body of musicians joined in performing Verdi's "Anvil Chorus" ("Vedi! Le fosche") from *Il Trovatore*.[24] In response to the latter, Byers penned the only derisive part of his review: "The closing piece was not creditably rendered. The sledgehammer blows were examples of awkward striking. Almost any blacksmith or horseshoer in town would have dealt the licks with more musical accuracy."[25] In the heart of America's mining country, a poor imitation of anvils being worked at dawn would draw a critic's ire, though he otherwise appreciated the jovial strains celebrating hard work and good wine.

The following year, 1873, the DCU hosted "the first grand musical convention of Colorado," which drew interest across the territory and from farther afield. Chicagoan Henry Perkins attended the convention, corresponding his impressions in Robert Goldbeck's periodical *The Musical Independent*. By then the DCU numbered between sixty to seventy singers, and participants from Greeley, Longmont, and Boulder supplemented the ensemble to total more than

[23] Corbett, Hoye & Co., *1873 Directory of the City of Denver* (Denver: Tribune Association), 163.

[24] Titles of individual numbers were given in English translation, or a popular sobriquet, though titles of the complete originating works (i.e., *Der Freischütz* and *Il Trovatore*) were given in the original language; therefore, it has not been possible to ascertain whether they sang in the original language, an English translation, or (as much of the group was of German descent) a German translation.

[25] *RMN*, 22 May 1872, 4.

150 singers. “In every respect a success,” Perkins wrote, “highly creditable to the managers of the Choral Union, and the City of Denver.” Of the hometown group’s musical competence, he wrote that DCU members were “not only very ready readers, but ‘brim full’ of the social element so characteristic of the people of the West.” Fanny Peters was hailed again in the nationally circulated journal, and among the others mentioned by name were watchmen, masons, teachers, mineralogists, and rail conductors.[26] This—an early report on Denver’s cultural offerings by a tourist, which was printed outside the territory—acknowledges the aspirations of musicians and managers, from Byers to Sanborn, to attain legitimacy and recognition for the Choral Union. The amazed Perkins concluded: “the desert has been made to *blossom like a rose*,” likening Denver to depictions of Judea in Isaiah 35, “for Denver is now a delightful city and a pleasant home.”[27]

The first Denver Choral Union lasted only through its auspicious second season. It was succeeded first by the Handel and Haydn Society (1874), then the Abt Club (1878; named for Franz Abt), and another iteration of the Choral Union (1879; discussed below), which were each managed by the influential community builder John Jay Joslin (1829–1926).[28] A mercantile and social entrepreneur, Joslin arrived in Denver in December 1872.[29] He was a highly respected

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[26] The names of musicians recognized by Perkins in this article were cross-referenced against the *1873 Corbett, Hoye & Co.’s Directory of the City of Denver*.

[27] H. S. P. [Henry S. Perkins], “Trip to Denver,” *The Musical Independent* 4, no. 3 (February 1873), 69.

[28] The organization of the Abt Club was reported in *RMN*, 17 October 1878, 4. The organization was named for German composer and choral conductor Franz Abt (1819–1885), whose 1872 tour of the United States at the invitation of the North American Sängerbund had invigorated an interest in choral singing. See Nick Strimple, *Choral Music in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Amadeus Press, 2008), 75–76; also, Snyder, “Männerchor Tradition in USA,” 66-67.

[29] Social entrepreneurs, which would describe Horace Tabor along with John Joslin, invested in social capital not as an alternative to, but a pre-requisite, for political mobilization: for Joslin, to an elevated stature within his musical community and the advancement of his business; for Tabor, political mobilization that, he hoped, would one day lead to a successful gubernatorial bid. For discussion on “social entrepreneurship” as described here, see Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 398–399. Within months he purchased the local branch of the New York Store, renaming it Joslin’s Dry Goods. After growing the store into a regional franchise, Joslin’s operated from 1873 until 1995, with its flagship store standing from 1887 on the southern corner of Sixteenth and Curtis streets, neighboring the Tabor Grand Opera House for much of that time, both the design of Frank E. Edbrooke; see William Ferril, *Sketches of Colorado: Being*

businessman, known for playing a prominent part in the business and social interests of the city. An entry on Joslin in Wilbur Stone's *History of Colorado* (1918) named him among the city's most important civic leaders, saying that he had lived a busy life of "active participation in those interests which make for cultural progress and the betterment of the individual and the community."[30] Joslin was also an avocational singer (tenor, it seems), and sang as part of a quartet at the dedication of the Baptist Church's new Johnson & Son organ shortly after his arrival in the West.[31] After the disintegration of the first Denver Choral Union, of which he was a member, Joslin led the formation of Denver's Handel and Haydn Society, which Byers announced on June 24, 1874, so that "music may keep pace with the many other arts which abound in the prosperous 'city of the plains,' and tend to make it still more attractive."[32]

Nominally democratic and generally middle-class, the society organized itself in a manner that demonstrated its seriousness of purpose, commitment to accountability, and its members' grubstake in its operations. Joslin introduced formal opportunities for fundraising, which the group's members advocated to its audience, and made available a consistent source of financial support by offering honorary memberships to the highest-giving contributors. In a column on the founding of the Handel and Haydn Society, the *Denver Daily Times* encouraged all citizens to support the new organization in the interest of improving the quality of life in Denver:

> This society will doubtless do much to increase the love and knowledge of music in our city, and will bring out the standard productions of the best musical authors. . . . Probably many citizens who are not singers, and for whom the

an Analytical Summary and Biographical History of the State of Colorado (Denver: Western Press Bureau, 1911), 1:208–209; Mark A. Barnhouse, *Lost Department Stores of Denver* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2018), 17–18.

[30] Joslin's Dry Goods Store," *RMN*, 20 April 1873, 3; Wilbur Fisk Stone, *History of Colorado*, (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1918), 2:363.

[31] *RMN*, 31 May 1873, 4.

[32] *RMN*, 24 June 1874, 4.

> honorary membership was especially intended, will avail themselves of the privilege to become honorary members.[33]

While the group was supported in part by membership dues, the Handel and Haydn Society solicited subscriptions to observe rehearsals and performances at the rate of $5 annually, placing the organization on stable enough footing that they invested in a piano and music library.[34] Calling upon "patrons of music, and other public spirited citizens" to support the Society seems to have been Joslin's development initiative. And it paid off. After their initial performance in May of Handel's oratorio *Esther* with orchestra, they gave two more concerts in October and December 1874 before taking on an ambitious performance of Haydn's *The Creation* in February 1875. Yet even after this auspicious start, the Society faded from sight when several of its singers moved their membership to the German Abt Club in 1879, and eventually created the second iteration of the Choral Union.[35] Joslin again led this organization's board of directors, with the young law student Frank M. Hardenbrook serving as secretary and treasurer, and appointed one Mrs. Lorenzo Dow its music director.

Identified through censuses, Mrs. Lorenzo Dow was Sabrina H. Dow.[36] Born in Maine in 1830, she excelled at the piano and singing, and was trained in theory and musicianship, though it is unknown how formal this education was. She and her husband Lorenzo—a lawyer, miner, and inventor of irrigation systems—had an established household in Orangetown, New York, with three children, a gardener, and two domestic servants. They moved from New York to Colorado sometime between the printing of the sixth and seventh annual city directories,

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[33] *Denver Daily Times*, 24 June 1874, 4.

[34] This annual membership would be roughly equivalent to US$(2017)111.00.

[35] Baber-Pathorne, *The Musical History of Colorado*, 31–34; Miles, *Orpheus in the* Wilderness, 36–37.

[36] *U.S. Census, 1870*, Orangetown, Rockland, New York, M593–1087, 591A; *U.S. Census 1880*, Denver, Arapahoe, Colorado, 88, 138B, Enumeration District: 006.

between 1878 and 1879. Though it appears the family lived in Denver for only two years or so, Mrs. Dow had a lasting influence on the cultural life of the city, particularly its amateur musical community. Baber-Pathorne wrote of Sabrina Dow:

> [Her piano recitals] were brilliant, and the interest in them was largely added to by her lectures on Musical History. Mrs. Dow was most undoubtedly a lady of deep reading and study on all points connected with the subject, and to her is due the credit of having shown to the musical students of this western country that there was far more to learn in the study of music than merely the technique of an instrument.

On at least one occasion, Dow was joined in her ambitious lecture-concert "The Origin of Music" by Frank Damrosch—eldest son to the Damrosch musical dynasty and a recent newcomer to Denver, pursuing a business career—in performing a two-piano arrangement of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466.[37] And when the Denver Conservatory of Music was organized in 1880 under the direction of English organist and composer Arthur W. Marchant, Sabrina Dow instructed piano, singing, and rudiments for female students. Her departure shortly thereafter was lamented by community musicians, Baber-Pathorne recalling: "Mrs. Dow's stay in Denver was an era in the musical history of the city, and her departure was regretted alike by pupil and friend."[38] The family returned East, initially to Boston, then to New York City. In Boston, Dow published *Artistic Singing* (1883), a treatise on the bel canto pedagogical lineage of Manuel García, Eliodoro Bianchi, and Cesar Badiali—the latter she claimed was her teacher—and spent her final years traveling to speak on vocal pedagogy.[39] Dow

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[37] Lucy Poate Stebbins and Richard Poate Stebbins, *Frank Damrosch: Let the People Sing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1945), vii, 54–57; Miles, *Orpheus in the* Wilderness, 70-71.

[38] Baber-Pathorne, *The Musical History of Colorado*, 66–67.

[39] Not only did Sabrina Dow intend for this "little book" to instruct its readership, students of singing and in particular her "pupils who have asked that such a book should be written," in bel canto technique, but also to teach general readers who had become complicit with a declined state of vocal technique among contemporary performers: "General taste for music has greatly advanced during the last twenty-five years, especially in our own country, and skill in all departments of instrumental performance has increased in the same proportion; while the question recurs why is there so little improvement in vocal culture or in appreciation of what fine singing really is?

died on May 25, 1893, having made significant contributions to avocational musicianship and pedagogy in frontier and eastern metropolises.[40]

Examining Sabrina Dow's work, and especially her role in instituting musical societies in Colorado, provides a glimpse at the independence, even authority, of creative women engaged in the American West, and dovetails with the origins of Denver's amateur operatic community. Not only did her arrival in Denver align with the start of the leisure boom in the late-nineteenth century, but also a time when middle- and upper-class women were increasingly allowed opportunities to work outside of the domestic sphere, and to make a name for themselves in a profession. It is entirely possible that Alice Oates, Caroline Richings, and Emma Abbott inspired Dow's mettle.

Inaugurating Amateur Opera: *H.M.S. Pinafore* at the "Port of Denver"

Denverites' earliest ventures in producing opera initially resulted from the confluence of two significant phenomena: the sustained presence of local choral organizations discussed above, and the appearance of Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy operas in America. John Lowerson, in his formative study of the amateur operatic movement in Great Britain, has stated that late-Victorian Britain's trade with the rest of the world included the minor export of the Savoy operas and their performance by amateurs.[41] This cultural transfer was accomplished around the world by British

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Our critics demand of the pianist a perfect technique, but they applaud the most ordinary singer. The resources of the voice are so little understood that we seem not to expect an artistic rendering of music by the most facile, the most expressive of all instruments." Sabrina H. Dow, *Artistic Singing* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1883), 17–20.

[40] Obituaries for Sabrina H. Down in *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 2 June 1893, 5; *Boston Journal*, 2 June 1893, 7; obituary for Lorenzo Dow, *New York Times*, 14 October 1899, 7.

[41] John Lowerson, *Amateur Operatics: A Social and Cultural History* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005), 208–233.

settlers and Anglophiles, and Denver was no exception. Moreover, Denver's amateur operatic societies engaged these works at a deeper level to establish their own avocational culture.

On May 4, 1879, the *News* enthusiastically reported: the "good ship Pinafore has been sighted," manned by as "popular and efficient a crew as ever gathered under a ship's mast."[42] The nautically inspired announcement of Gilbert and Sullivan's opera *H.M.S. Pinafore* at the Forrester Opera House boasted civic pride for Sabrina Dow and the Choral Union, a group of local artists prepared to undertake the popular new work. While such statements preceding the performances by the "Choral Crew" amount to exaggerated puffs, they also reveal the audience's eagerness to witness this international sensation in a "very meritorious production." They also signal the outset of a year-long *Pinafore* craze in Denver. Before the close of 1879, three more performances of the work would appear in the city, in addition to a revival of the original production by the DCU before its dissolution in September 1879. Each subsequent performance gave audiences an opportunity to experience the work anew through various adaptations, whether performed by children, local amateurs, or touring professionals. The robust operatic culture that sprang up around *H.M.S. Pinafore* demonstrated the resolution by Denver's citizens to both patronize and produce opera.

H.M.S. Pinafore, with its farcical logic and captivating melodies, assured William Schwenck Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan an elevated place in English-speaking theaters, both in Britain and the United States. Gilbert and Sullivan premiered *H.M.S. Pinafore*, their first major success, at London's Opera Comique on May 25, 1878. Details of *H.M.S. Pinafore*'s early American performances, of its immense popularity, and of its pivotal position in discourses on

[42] *RMN*, 4 May 1879, 4.

intellectual property laws have been well documented elsewhere.[43] The absence of international copyright allowed for the emergence of productions across the Atlantic, with the first American performance occurring at the Boston Museum on November 25, 1878, a remarkably narrow window of five months before it arrived in Denver. Before long, *H.M.S. Pinafore* sailed across the continent to San Francisco's Bush Theater, and by the end of 1879 roughly one hundred and fifty companies had performed it in some form in more than sixty cities across the country.[44] This led the *American Register* to philosophize that "its blended fun and innocency have proved irresistible to our American audiences;" furthermore, the writer believed that it was "not improbable that this comparatively unimportant work may be the means of starting the great work of the regeneration of the modern stage in our native land."[45]

Similarly, *H.M.S. Pinafore* became a star vehicle for Denver's amateur musicians. When the second Choral Union was inaugurated under the leadership of John Joslin and Sabrina Dow, the *News* reported that they intended to begin at once "active rehearsal of *H.M.S. Pinafore* . . . to be produced at the opera house after Lent."[46] They engaged Eugene Jepson as the stage director,

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[43] Harold Kanthor, "*H.M.S. Pinafore* and the Theater Season in Boston 1878–1879," *Journal of Popular Culture* 24, no. 4 (Spring 1991): 119–127; Bordman, *American Operetta: From H.M.S. Pinafore to Sweeney Todd*; Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 34–46; Root, *American Popular Stage Music*, 166–169. On the global Gilbert and Sullivan movement and participatory performances in territories of the British diaspora (namely colonial India), see Tobias Becker, "Entertaining the Empire: Touring Companies and Amateur Dramatics in Colonial India," *Historical Journal* 57, no. 3 (2014): 699–725.

[44] Colin Prestige, "D'Oyly Carte and the Pirates: The Original New York Productions of Gilbert and Sullivan," in *Gilbert and Sullivan: Papers Presented at the International Conference Held at the University of Kansas in May 1970*, ed. James Helyar (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Libraries, 1971); Earl F. Bargainnier, "W. S. Gilbert and American Musical Theatre," *Journal of Popular Culture* 12, no. 3 (Winter 1978): 446.

[45] *American Register*, 10 May 1879; quoted in Colin Prestige, "D'Oyly Carte and the Pirates: The Original New York," in *Gilbert and Sullivan: Papers Presented at the International Conference Held at the University of Kansas in May 1970*, ed. James Helyar (Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications, 1971), 115.

[46] "To Produce the *Pinafore*," *RMN*, 20 March 1879, 4.

also cast him as Ralph Rackstraw.[47] Jepson had worked in Hartford, Connecticut, as a printer and elocutionist, and upon returning east to Jersey City in 1880, he was listed in the census as an "actor, vocalist, and salesman."[48] Years later, Baber-Pathorne remembered him well enough to categorize Jepson as a "tenor robusto," perhaps indicating an unrefined quality to his voice.[49] His trajectory as a professional thespian is traceable thereafter partly through Brown's *A History of the New York Stage*, and by 1887 he was listed regularly as a member of the Bostonians, taking a variety of speaking and singing roles in works by Gilbert and Sullivan and young Victor Herbert.[50] Jepson's performances in Denver were part of his development as an artist, a stop in his journey from avocational to vocational musicianship. Committing more time and energy to Denver's musical organizations, in fact, prepared Jepson for a professional career. With Joslin and Dow, Jepson's collaboration in singing, organizing, directing, and improving the overall

[47] Eugene O. Jepson (1852–1908) was first mentioned in the Denver press in May 1879 in conjunction with the *H.M.S. Pinafore* announcement. Eugene and his younger brother Edwin likely spent less than a year in Denver, given the appearance of their name in only one city directory, during which time they had brief stints as apothecaries and purveyors of Jepson's Dyspepsia Bitters. During his time in Denver he sang in the choir of Temple Emmanuel—the oldest synagogue between Missouri and California—performed a benefit concert for the West Denver German Methodist Church, published a book of original songs, and took the tenor role in Dudley Buck's secular cantata, *The Legend of Don Munio*. For further discussion on the professional business dealings of Eugene Jepson, see Mike Holzwarth, "Jepson's Dyspepsia Bitters" *Peachridge Glass* (blog), 23 November 2011, https://www.peachridgeglass.com /2011/11/jepsons-dyspepsia-bitters-colorado/; *Impressed in Time: Colorado Beverage Bottles, Jugs & Etc., 1859–1915* (Boulder: Antique Bottle Collectors of Colorado, 1987); Corbett, Hoye & Co.'s, *1880 8th Annual Denver City Directory* (Denver: Tribune Association), 214–215; see also Jepson's business advertisements in *RMN*, 7 September 1879, 8; *RMN*, 10 August 1879, 10.

[48] *U.S. Census, 1880,* Jersey City, New Jersey, 783, 529D, Enumeration District: 019.

[49] The Boston-based *Musical Record* later took some interest in Jepson, reporting in July 1881 that he would summer in Europe to improve his already "well known tenor," and that he would join the troupe of Denman Thompson as an actor; *Musical Record*, 7 September 1881, 642. Henry Miles stated inaccurately that Jepson was an "outsider" and a *former* member of the Denman Thompson Opera Company now retired from the professional stage;" however, Jepson had not yet joined Denman's company when he was active in Denver, and was hardly an outsider in that he had business and personal interests in Denver beyond a single opera production; see Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 37.

[50] T. Allston Brown, *A History of the New York Stage from the First Performance in 1732 to 1901* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1903).

artistic quality of the Denver Choral Union's initial *H.M.S. Pinafore* performances was formative for the company, and a wellspring for local operatic endeavors.

Table 3 Amateur cast of Denver Choral Union's 1879 production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

Character	Performer	Performer's Occupation[51]
Sir Joseph Porter	Mr. B. E. Hawkins	Photographer.
Captain Corcoran	Mr. Charles E. Fiske	Foreman at Times bindery.
Ralph Rackstraw	Mr. Eugene O. Jepson	Jepson Bros. & Co., dyspepsia bitters.
Dick Deadeye	Mr. Frank Kratzer	Proprietor, Howard & Kratzer, cigars, tobacco and sample room.
Bill Bobstay	Mr. R. J. Carson	Clerk at Riethman & Co., wholesale druggists.
Josephine (First)	Miss Anna French née Clifford	[Music teacher along with husband Frank T. French.][52]
Josephine (Second)	Mrs. T. D. Sears	[Husband was Thomas D. Sears, an agent for Laflin & Rand Gun Powder Company.]
Little Buttercup (First)	Mrs. Lorenzo Dow	See commentary above.
Little Buttercup (Second)	Mrs. John Reynolds	[Husband was possibly a hostler at the stables of Wm. Phillips, and a stonecutter.]
Cousin Hebe (First)	Miss Sue Green[53]	[Husband was possibly Hubert R. Green, clothier at A. M. Williams.]
Cousin Hebe (Second)	Mrs. Perry Gardner	[Husband was a clerk at Hallack & Howard Lumber Company.]

On May 4, the *News* recorded the cast, which was described as "just about all musical."[54] Table 3 identifies members of the Denver Choral Union, their roles in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and their professions—or in the case of the female members, the professions of their husbands. As indicated by the cast list, the female roles were to be performed by two singers apiece. Though it was reasonably common to alternate performances of the same work with multiple casts, it was stated in the report that Mrs. Dow intended to divide each performance in half, having one

[51] Compiled from Corbett, Hoye & Co.'s, *1879 7th Annual Denver City Directory* (Denver: Tribune Association), and Corbett, Hoye & Co.'s, *1880 8th Annual Denver City Directory* (Denver: Tribune Association). The performers listed here differ only slightly from those reviewed when the production opened on 20 May 1879.

[52] The day after the opening of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, it was also announced in the news that Miss Anna Clifford had married Frank T. French, organist at the First Baptist Church and one of the pianists to play for the rehearsals of the Denver Choral Union; see, "Marriage of Professor French," *RMN*, 21 May 1879, 4. Unfortunately, Mr. French died early the next year following a brief illness; "In Memoriam," *RMN*, 15 January 1880, 8.

[53] Miss Sue Green was a prominent socialite and beloved hostess in Denver; from 1881–1883, she and her husband hosted New Year's Day parties that were advertised as "open houses" and one of the finest receptions in the city.

[54] "The Choral Crew," 4 May 1879, 6.

woman sing the first act, while another was responsible for the second act. As this arrangement seemed unconventional even at the time, she explained that this arrangement was made so "nearly all of the leading members of the Union might appear in the cast which is small," and that the chorus of First Lord's sisters, his cousins, and his aunts would prove the "prime feature of the entertainment" regardless of who took the lead roles.[55] In total, the cast was thirty voices strong, divided almost evenly between men and women.

Mrs. Dow's arrangement solved in one way a problem with *H.M.S. Pinafore* that remains an issue for amateur productions today: there are double the number of roles for men than those for women and, as demonstrated by the ratio of men to women in chorus, there are often fewer male than female participants in voluntary opera companies. Now, according to Mrs. Dow's solution, six men and six women were cast in lead roles, and the chorus included ten women and eight men. Participating in this production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* enabled Denver's middle-class female musicians to overcome a stigma associated with public performance by women, a stigma that was not unique to Denver but attached to female performance across the country. Engaging in the serious, organized activities of the Choral Union gained status and legitimacy for participants; for Mrs. Dow and the music teacher Miss Anna Clifford, their symbiotic relationships with the avocational organization aided their professional endeavors, as well as their local prestige and recognition.[56]

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[55] "The Choral Crew," 4 May 1879, 6. Based on reviews of the first performance, however, it seems that eventually the women were assigned the entirety of their role, which they performed on alternate evenings, the *News* stating: "Tonight the cast is to be changed slightly," followed by the names of those listed as "Second" in the table above. See, "Performance of 'Pinafore'," *RMN*, 21 May 1879, 4.

[56] On the social history of women's participation in amateur opera productions, especially of the Savoy operas of Gilbert and Sullivan from the late-Victorian to the inter-war period, see Shani D'Cruze, "Dainty Little Fairies: Women, Gender and the Savoy Operas," *Women's History Review* 9, no. 2 (2000): 345–367.

On the whole, the respectability, conventionality, and conservatism of the DCU, along with possibilities for play and self-fulfillment, served as the impetus for members' emotional investment and commitment of time to the organization. As a recreational association, the Choral Union distinguished itself from earlier singing societies, several of which were rooted in male fraternity, and along secular lines, professing morality without any direct connection to a church or reform movement, as was the case with other amateur Savoyard and choral societies.[57]

Likely, each singer was learning their role for the first time, and with opening night just two weeks away, the management of the Choral Union apparently desired to scapegoat any underwhelming performances, stating that if the performance was not "a very meritorious presentation of Sullivan's comedy, it will not be for want of sufficient rehearsal." Already in this report there is a whiff of the brooding animosity between management and performers, which became even more evident before the end of the company's first season. Nevertheless, rehearsals moved along, and before long it was announced that the production would open on Tuesday, May 20, 1879, at the Forrester Opera House. Ticket prices were also announced for the six-day run in front-page advertisements blazing "A Hit—A Palpable Hit!," with prices ranging from 50 cents to one dollar for the best seats, and the Saturday matinée was offered to families with reduced prices between 50 and 75 cents. These rates were typical for performances at Forrester's involving music. By comparison, an advertisement that appeared along those for the Choral Union promoted a vaudeville company of "twenty lady artists" led by male impersonator

[57] On amateur Gilbert and Sullivan societies in the United Kingdom, and in particular their affiliation with Methodist Churches, see Ian Bradley, "Amateur Tenors Sing Choruses in Public: The World of Amateur Performance," in *Oh Joy! Oh Rapture: The Enduring Phenomenon of Gilbert and Sullivan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 122–124.

Blanche Selwyn announced that their performances would be given the following week "without increase to the prices of the opera," that is *H.M.S. Pinafore*.[58]

Nearer opening night, the *Tribune* published a column responding to the "thousand inquiries" received about the content of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and its music. For at least part of the audience, it was necessary to distinguish the work as "not an opera bouffe, nor an extravaganza, nor the conventional musical dramas of Bellini and Verdi," but a work whose "wit lies in the adaptation of the most grotesque situations to the most serious operatic forms."[59] Following the dress rehearsal, the same article commended Mrs. Dow for her preparation of the chorus, stating that they had learned the parts with precision, and had become remarkably able actors under the direction of Mr. Jepson.[60] These comments validated the adequacy of training and competence of the ensemble.

Reviews of the performances were exuberant, if not regularly over the top: "It requires a student of art—one familiar with the nicest details of music—to analyze the beauties of *Pinafore*."[61] While the Denver press acknowledged the opera's humor, they also stated that much of it was lost on those whose politics did not accord with satirizing "the elevation of a Mr. Smith, a thrifty hardware merchant, to the head of the British admiralty."[62] After all, this was the West, a frontier of Manifest Destiny and rugged entrepreneurs, with a hardware merchant or two and their wife filling the company of amateurs. The principals were singled out in reviews, most of

[58] The relative value of tickets is equivalent to US$(2017)12.70 on the low end and $25.30 on the high. For the side-by-side advertisements of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and Blanch Selwyn's Boston Star Company, see *RMN*, 24 May 1879, 1.

[59] *Denver Tribune*, 19 May 1879, 6.

[60] "Dress Rehearsal of 'Pinafore'," *RMN*, 20 May 1879, 4.

[61] "Performance of *Pinafore*, Successful Debut of the Choral Union in Sullivan's Popular Opera," *RMN*, 21 May 1879, 4.

[62] "The Choral Crew," *RMN*, 22 May 1879, 4.

which were favorable, celebrating their station in the city as well as their musical abilities. The "excellent judgment and ability" and leadership of Sabrina Dow was extolled: "The lady wields the baton with the grace of a professional, and tends in a great measure to preserve the excellent harmony noticeable in the orchestral music and the choruses."[63] Evidently, Sabrina Dow did not sing the role of Little Buttercup as originally advertised until the last performance on May 24.[64].

On the whole, *H.M.S. Pinafore* was deemed vivacious, diverting, and an unprecedented success. The *News* published this bon-voyage message on behalf of their audiences when the production concluded:

> The *Pinafore* ship has moved out of the harbor for the present with its jolly crew, but the memory of its pleasures will linger pleasantly with those who heard it. May it find clear sailing in all its voyages is the wish of everybody and everybody's "sisters, cousins and aunts."[65]

Productions continued to appear so rapidly that there was hardly time for *H.M.S. Pinafore* to become a memory. Through July 1879, members of the Choral Union toured to Colorado Springs, Boulder, and the new opera house in Central City. They were the pride of Denver society and eagerly monitored in the press.

Shortly thereafter, the society suffered a devastating loss when bookbinder Charles Fiske, their Captain Corcoran, died after a short illness. The Choral Union, along with the Masonic lodge and the Baptist church, went about preparing his funeral, and to caring for his wife and two children.[66] At their first meeting following his death, members of the organization adopted a resolution, which was printed in all the city's newspapers: "Resolved, That this society cause to

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[63] Ibid.

[64] This performance was conducted by W. H. Allen, "the handsome young pianist" who worked as a bookkeeper for W. W. Montelius, owner of the city's largest piano, organ, and music merchandiser.

[65] *RMN*, 25 May 1879, 4.

[66] "A Sudden Death," *RMN*, 1 July 1879, 4.

be placed upon its records this testimony to our late associate, whose manly and genial character, and whose love of music won our high esteem."[67] In this regard, the Denver Choral Union, having organized itself to perform a comic operetta with few parallels to their own social experience, provisioned collaboration and connection for amateur musicians. When priorities shifted—to provide for the needs of those related directly to the organization—the Choral Union proved itself to be a centering community of caring musical associates.

Six weeks following the closing of the Choral Union's production, the New York Standard Pinafore Company arrived.[68] Audiences were enthusiastic about the troupe, and especially for the opportunity to judge the professionals against the amateurs.[69] The opening performance on July 1 was well attended, but it was downhill from there. According to the press, the chorus of the Standard Company was "much weaker" than that of the Choral Union, lacking the "harmony that made the choruses of the union so enjoyable." Though the principal singers did intelligibly render the satire of the work, they also contrasted poorly in dramatic effect and vocal talent with the amateurs. Duly, the *News* warned them to perform other pieces to avoid further loss and unnecessary uneasiness between the amateurs and professionals.[70] They did not heed this warning, however, and were forced to disband and liquidate their scenery and costumes

[67] "The Choral Union's Tribute," *RMN*, 20 July 1879, 8.

[68] Many companies toured the United States touting themselves as "standard"—i.e., representative and authentic productions—so it is difficult to distinguish one from another, and not necessarily useful. On the proliferation of "standard" companies, the satirical Canadian magazine *Grip* commented: "New York proposes to call back its *Pinafore* companies before the next census is taken. If it don't there is no knowing where the balance of power will light." *Grip* 13, no. 3 (7 June 1879), [6].

[69] The music director of this New York Standard Pinafore Company was the composer H. Gordon Temple, its business was managed by Charles Vivian; the cast was never advertised completely, but included in the press were reviews of performances by W. H. Stanley (Ralph), Miss Belle Davis (Josephine), Miss Kitty Kellogg (Cousin Hebe), Mr. Knight (Dick Deadeye); see "*Pinafore* by Professionals," *RMN*, 1 July 1879, 4. On the crucial but variable interdependence of amateur and professional operatic companies, see Lowerson, *Amateur Operatics*, 172–195.

[70] "The *Pinafore* Performances," *RMN*, 2 July 1879, 4.

two weeks later. Several members of the company were stranded in Denver, giving benefit concerts to make their rail fare to return home. Touring to Denver had bankrupted another traveling opera company.[71]

At the same time, beginning on July 11, Mrs. Nate Forrester, the wife of the owner of the Forrester Opera House, placed the first of several advertisements calling for "ten misses and ten masters" to partake in the Juvenile Pinafore. Only days later, Mrs. Forrester announced that the juvenile *Pinafore* ship was almost ready to "set sail from the opera house harbor." She was pleased with the assembled cast, and produced the list of performers, which would "prove the most entertaining presentation of the operetta that Denver has had."[72] At first, it might appear that such a performance appealed primarily to adult audiences indulging in the comedy of watching child actors ape mature, romantic characters. Yet this hugely successful phenomenon was part of a much larger sensation. Juvenile *Pinafore* companies were forming all over, largely to contrast the seriousness and bawdiness of many grown-up entertainments, and were part of a long tradition of all-child productions that enjoyed great popular and critical success on both sides of the Atlantic as early as the 1840s.[73] Given the prevalence of Saturday family matinée's and reduced ticket prices for the juvenile *Pinafore*, however, Denver's all-children performances appealed to children as much as their caretakers, and were another way in which the Forresters and their theater could capitalize on the craze for Gilbert and Sullivan productions. As any

[71] On the failure of this company and their subsequent benefit concerts, threats of arrest for performing on Sunday, and run-ins with city officials, see Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 201–202.

[72] "Juvenile Pinafore," *RMN*, 13 July 1879, 4.

[73] The initially American phenomenon of juvenile *H.M.S. Pinafore* productions cast entirely with children originated at the Broad Street Theater, Philadelphia on April 14, 1879. On "age transvestism" and juvenile performances, see Marah Gubar, "Who Watched the Children's Pinafore?: Age Transvestism on the Nineteenth-Century Stage," *Victorian Studies* 54, no. 3 (Spring 2012): 410–426. Gubar rejects the critical assumption that child casts were "valued by adults for their inept otherness," and contends instead that they entranced mixed-age audiences by "functioning as liminal figures whose precocious competence destabilized the idea that a strict line divided child from adult, innocence from experience."

theater producer can attest, a work that calls for children's ensemble comes with the added benefit of ticket-buying parents and grandparents, not to mention sisters, cousins, and aunts. The juvenile *Pinafore* proved to be the best-attended cultural offering of the season.

To Denver audiences, *H.M.S. Pinafore* exhibited contemporary humor, a middlebrow romance between members of different social classes, and lampoons on the monarchy and military. In no small part, the Savoy opera appealed to the same American middle-class audience that enjoyed European operas in English translation at the Tabor Grand Opera House. They did so because these were operas in their tongue, and further helped connect them to an influential and global beau monde. Within one year of its premier in London, Denver audiences received both amateur and professional productions of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Denverites' benefit from supporting and partaking in operatic performances became plainly evident. Local amateur operatic clubs guaranteed respectability, drawing both their members and most of their audience from the middle classes of a booming, prosperous city. Performing in and attending *H.M.S. Pinafore* was a self-legitimizing activity, viewed as a means of celebrating the community's collective identity, and inspired local amateur musicians to tackle contemporary social and political issues in an entertaining manner by creating their own comic operas.

Factiousness Among Denver's Amateur Opera Societies

In January 1882, antipathy among Denver's amateur opera enthusiasts was reaching a boiling point. Recent disputes between members of one organization had led to the secession of half its membership and the formation of a second competing company, and now both were within weeks of opening productions at the Tabor Grand Opera House. The rift seemed so dire for the city's artistic community that the *Denver Republican* dedicated two columns to discussing

the matter, including an interview with one participant who wanted to assure audiences that there was space enough in the market for two opera companies. The column, "Amateur Actors. The Rivalry Among the Respective Clubs, and the Prospects for Success," began with some anxious editorial commentary:

> Amateur opera circles have been agitated to a considerable extent in Denver since the production of *The Pirates of Penzance* and *The Mascot*, last fall. The seeds of dissension were sown at that time, and jealousy slowly but surely worked itself into the ranks, until an open rupture resulted. The club was composed of some fine musical and dramatic talent, and it is a pity that it could not have been held together. But it was ordained otherwise, and now the opposing factions have arrayed themselves one against the other, and have organized separate companies, under the management of rival conductors. There is blood on the face of the moon, so to speak, and there will be a desperate endeavor on the part of both wings to attach some scalps to their belts. It remains to be demonstrated which will prove the victor.[74]

Readers of this column gleaned not only information on how the organizations came into existence, but also a sense of how deep this rivalry ran. Painted with characteristic purple prose, the "blood on the face of the moon" is a revelatory, apocalyptic vision of the fate of these two groups. Even after multiple pleas from the press, however, they did not come to terms, and refused to learn to share the limited resources, including personnel, governance, and finances, available to local theatricals. In another gruesome reference to the brutal genocide of Native Americans at the expense of "civilizing the West," the writer suggests that members of the Colorado Opera Club and Denver Opera Club are out to scalp each other, that they would decorate their wartime belts with maimed trophies from the other club's members.[75] The predictions that Denver's amateur musicians would not make it through this rift were accurate.

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[74] *Denver Republican*, 9 January 1882, 8.

[75] A "scalp belt" was no flippant, atypical metaphor for the time; it was such a threadbare literary allusion that it even made its way into children's literature, for example with the continual discussion of a "scalp belt" in Carol Ryrie Brink's *Caddie Woodlawn* (1936), winner of the John Newbery Medal, which is still widely read by American elementary-school children. "The 'Scalp Belt' in *Caddie Woodlawn*," American Indians in Children's Literature,"

The competition among Denver's amateur musicians had been simmering since a year earlier. It began initially within a small company of church choristers led by Arthur W. Marchant, as they were preparing Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance.* Marchant, the Oxford-educated, English organist of St. John's Cathedral, arrived in early 1880, and in April of that year started the Denver Conservatory of Music, where interested parties could study piano or voice at the rate of fifteen dollars for ten weeks of instruction.[76] According to the vestry records of St. John's Cathedral in Denver, Marchant "disliked company and could not accommodate himself to the peculiarities of western life."[77] Regarding his rift with the group of amateur musicians, he stated that a "harmonious discord" developed among the group's musicians, and that several members began meeting in private—even after roles were assigned and rehearsals begun under his direction. He was surprised and justifiably incensed, then, when it was published that a governing board made of several members of his own group had formed the Denver Opera Club on February 2, 1881, with "promises of fine things in the near future," including their own production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. [78] The following week, Marchant published an open letter, in which he spelled out just how significant the treachery against him was: "It being evident that nothing but an unseemly quarrel can come from this state of affairs, I must emphatically decline being involved in so petty a wrankle and will leave a clear field to those who are so bent upon occupying it."[79]

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updated 6 May 2007, https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/2007/05/scalp-belt-in-caddie-woodlawn-ive-been.html.

[76] *RMN*, 25 April 1880, 8.

[77] St. John's Cathedral Vestry Record Book I, 1860–1877, Denver, Colorado, p. 251. On Marchant's rancor toward Denver and the press wars he held forth against an anonymous "Rigoletto" regarding the insinuation of plagiarism, see Linscome, *History of Musical Development in Denver*, 92–94.

[78] *RMN*, 6 February 1881, 2.

[79] *RMN*, 11 February 1881, 4.

The field cleared, Abraham (Abe) Kaufmann and Edward Pasmore led preparations of *The Pirates of Penzance*. Both were competent musicians —Kaufmann a violinist who had left his place in the orchestra of Caroline Richings-Bernard to stay in Denver, and Pasmore a pianist from San Francisco who purportedly accompanied Euphrosyne Parepa-Rosa on her western tours—and it was thought they worked as a formidable duo.[80] The initial production of the Denver Opera Club in May 1881 came off exceedingly well; so well, in fact, that from the pit Kaufmann refused any more encores to be called from the audience, owing to the onset of exhaustion in the chorus.[81]

When the Tabor Grand Opera House opened in September 1881, Kaufmann was named leader of the orchestra, and Tabor entrusted him and Pasmore to put amateur musicians on the new stage. Beginning October 24, 1881, the Denver Opera Club—now numbering more than one hundred members—alternated a week of *The Pirates of Penzance* with the comic opera *The Mascot* by Edmond Audran in an English translation by Theodore T. Barker. No expense was spared. Imported French dresses were brought from San Francisco, and the Tabor Grand invested in excess of one thousand dollars on new scenery, "more magnificent than anything has yet been seen in the West."[82] Furthermore, Tabor made a public display of donating his profits from *The Mascot* to Clara Barton and her recently formed American Red Cross to aid the "Michigan sufferers" of the Thumb Fire of 1881, the organization's first disaster relief operation.[83] Behind the scenes, however, tensions were growing between Kaufmann and Pasmore. The latter, as rehearsal pianist and charged with preparing the soloists, had recommended cuts to *The Mascot*

[80] Linscome, *History of Musical Development in Denver*, 182; *Denver Republican*, 10 January 1881, 1.

[81] "Denver Opera Company, *The Pirates of Penzance* Produced Last Evening," *RMN*, 3 May 1881, 4.

[82] Roughly equivalent to US$(2017)24,700.

[83] *RMN*, 16 October 1881, 6.

and modified tempi to make the arias more manageable for the singers. Kaufmann unstintingly disagreed, and without warning, instructed the orchestra to play their parts as written during the first performance. This resulted in a backstage fracas and the airing of long-held recriminations between the two that soon became very public.[84]

After secret ballots were taken by member of the Denver Opera Club, a faction detached itself, and elected as its music director Abe Kaufmann, who in his address to the first assembly of sixty members of the Colorado Opera Club stated:

> I want to impress upon your minds that it is not the President who runs the institution by any means. Every one of you who are or will become active members must put your shoulders to the wheel and work for the best interests of the society . . . We must avoid all quarrels, as they are the chief bane of musical societies. We must drop our personal ambitions and consider whatever action is taken is the action of the society. We must work as a family together, trying to feel that the interests of one are the interests of all.[85]

In this democratizing credo for the organization—intended also to warn against any lingering rancor held over from the former organization—Kaufmann was speaking to a membership of amateur musicians who were not merely interested in presenting well-known works. Beyond performing the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan as the earlier organization had, this club would craft a new work that added to the history and cultural fabric of their city. *Brittle Silver*, a community-based work that blurred the boundary between art and life, expanded the limits of opera's local relevancy, conveying its participants' daily life through idiomatic language, both musical and poetic. It also celebrated amateurs' ability to craft their identity in a work that addressed local politics, socioeconomic equity, and an obligation to civic involvement.

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[84] A full account of the backstage drama appeared in *Denver Tribune*, 16 November 1881; see also Linscome, *History of Musical Development in Denver*, 206–207.

[85] *Denver Republican*, 5 December 1881, 4.

Brittle Silver: An Operatic Time Capsule of Denver's Artistic Citizens

In her 1889 *Musical History of Colorado*, Ella Baber-Pathorne echoed the concern of others regarding the creation of a distinctive American musical culture. In her case, however, she could celebrate the triumph of a single opera, one that was uniquely Coloradan, and one which had earned high praise for its creators and performers, rivaling those heaped on even the biggest opera stars to visit the West. She wrote:

> American opera is a topic that has kept the musical world agog for years. It has filled magazines with articles…, and exhausted bank accounts, but here in this western country a purely native opera was written, composed, and given in a manner that compared favorably with any English opera troupe that has visited Denver.[86]

Brittle Silver was that "purely native opera," a homespun piece that made a significant contribution to place-making in Denver and inspired in its performers and audiences an affective attachment to the city. Premiered by the Colorado Opera Club at the Tabor Grand Opera House on January 23, 1882, it is a work that, on the surface, appears to be driven by the typical and expected plot devices found in countless other comic operas. These devices included the comic-romantic trope of "boy meets girl; boy loses girl; boy wins girl," coupled with obvious derivations of the paradoxical follies of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance*. In the following analysis, however, it becomes evident that *Brittle Silver* offered a deeper commentary on artistic citizenship and the Westernness of its performers and viewers. This western identity is evidenced in the plot's overt confidence in the reward of hard work, the sanctity of private

[86] Baber-Pathorne, *The Musical History of Colorado*, 54. Regrettably, until now those historians who have examined *Brittle Silver*—namely Sanford Linscome and Henry Miles's studies dedicated to the musical and theatrical history of Denver—have glossed over the importance of this work to its musical community, ignoring the wonderful nuance that makes this opera a remarkable artifact. Their commentary on the work is limited to these two statements: "The libretto of the opera cannot be considered as earth shaking from a literary standpoint;" Linscome, *History of Musical Development in Denver*, 414; and Miles's consideration of the premiere is limited to a single paragraph, concluding "*Brittle Silver* enjoyed commendable success during the weeklong presentation at the Tabor Grand Opera House;" *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 209.

property, and an intense faith in the opportunities promised by Manifest Destiny, offering a primer on the interdependence of the West's urban, mining, and indigenous populations. On account that no score of *Brittle Silver* has been found, this study relies almost entirely on the libretto, which was fortunately printed in its entirety in the Denver *Tribune* on January 23, 1882.

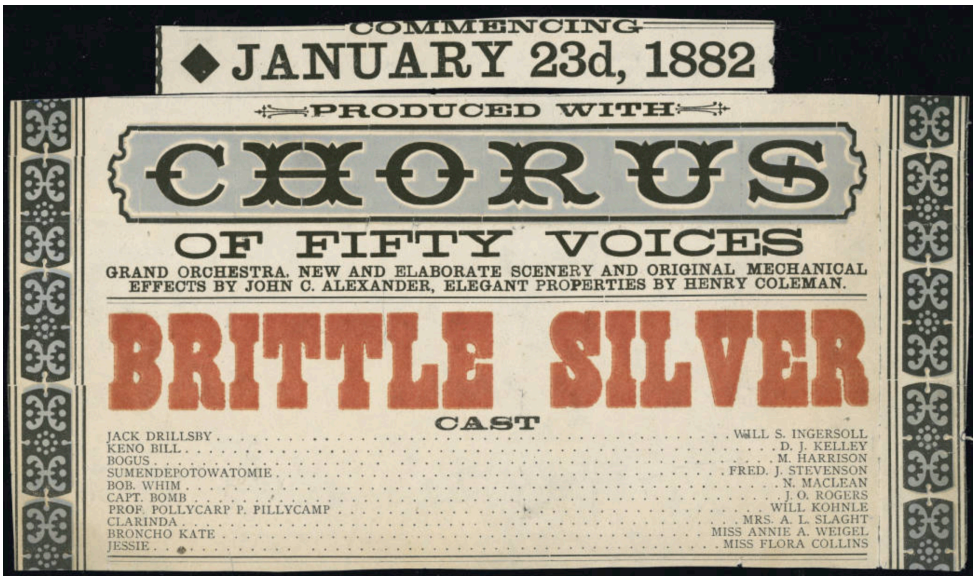
COMMENCING
JANUARY 23d, 1882
PRODUCED WITH
CHORUS
OF FIFTY VOICES
GRAND ORCHESTRA. NEW AND ELABORATE SCENERY AND ORIGINAL MECHANICAL EFFECTS BY JOHN C. ALEXANDER, ELEGANT PROPERTIES BY HENRY COLEMAN.
BRITTLE SILVER
CAST
JACK DRILLSBY . . . WILL S. INGERSOLL
KENO BILL . . . D. J. KELLEY
BOGUS . . . M. HARRISON
SUMENDEPOTOWATOMIE . . . FRED. J. STEVENSON
BOB. WHIM . . . N. MACLEAN
CAPT. BOMB . . . J. O. ROGERS
PROF. POLLYCARP P. PILLYCAMP . . . WILL KOHNLE
CLARINDA . . . MRS. A. L. SLAGHT
BRONCHO KATE . . . MISS ANNIE A. WEIGEL
JESSIE . . . MISS FLORA COLLINS

Figure 18 Part of broadside advertising *Brittle Silver* at the Tabor Grand Opera House, Denver, Colorado, January 1882. (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, C782.1 B778 1882.)

Set contemporaneously in Gunnison, Colorado, the romantic comedy *Brittle Silver* is woven with imagery and language drawn straight from the state's early-1880s silver mining boom.[87] The tenor Jack Drillsby has recently arrived on Colorado's Western Slope, and is operating on his own a small mine near the well-staffed and equipped operation of the "Honorable" Ezekiel Bogus, employer to the chorus of miners. Naturally, Jack has fallen in love with Bogus's daughter Clarinda. They cannot, however, act upon their affections for one another due to their conflicting social classes. The noble Native American chief Sumendepotowatomie

[87] An almost complete libretto (missing only two choruses, including the final "Brittle Silver Chorus," based on incomplete incipits) was reproduced in the *Denver Tribune*, 23 January 1882, 2–3. The newspaper's editors were quite proud of the fact that they had secured the rights to reproduce the libretto in full: "Although the piece has been copyrighted, the authors have kindly consented to its publication in *The Tribune*. Accordingly, the complete libretto is herewith given, the proofs having been carefully revised by Mr. Wood."

(perhaps a play on "Summon the Potawatomi," an Indigenous people of the Plains and Great Lakes), who is Jack's friend and a second father to Clarinda, has learned of the financial restrictions responsible for the young lovers' estrangement. In order to teach the pretentious industrialist Bogus a lesson in humility and make Jack and Clarinda's union possible, Sumendepotowatomie discloses his possession of a legal tract given to him as part of Ulysses S. Grant's "Peace Policy," which missionaries have delivered and taught him to read. It happens that he holds the legal rights to the land on which Bogus has staked his mining claim. The opera concludes with the chief transferring ownership of the land and his mineral rights to Jack, making the latter rich enough to marry Clarinda. Thrown in are scenes on the peregrinations of the tenderfeet (a colloquialism in the West for eastern tourists), and the scientific sentimentalisms of their guide, Professor Polycarp P. Pillicamp.

Praise for Colorado's natural beauty, its pioneering spirit, and commercial growth characteristic of the lyrics of *Brittle Silver* sprang from the pages of travel magazines and onto the lyric stage. Leading this effort was librettist Stanley Wood (1849–1936).[88] During his time in the American West, Wood labored as a newspaper man, writer, community booster, lyricist, and literary chief of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway, a position responsible for propagandizing western rail travel to potential tourists. His work as a literary booster paved the way for his popular magazine, the *Great Divide* (1889–1896), and two railway guidebooks, both of which went through several editions and sold hundreds of thousands of copies.[89] Wood was a member of the American West literati whose business it was to promote the region through writing that

[88] This was not the same Stanley L. Wood from Wales who was a noted illustrator of American Old West scenes for *Harper's* and *Pearson's Magazine*, as well as in-house illustrator for the British magazine *The War Illustrated* during World War I.

[89] These guidebooks were *Over the Range* (1889) and *Unattended Journey* (1895).

championed, as state historian James Kedro wrote, "a regional booster credo based upon the American dream in conjunction with a distinctive Rocky Mountain culture."[90] *Brittle Silver* was in every way a manifestation of Wood's promotional practices. Though his work was by its nature neither timeless nor universal, it was crafted to represent the place and time to which he and his creative friends belonged. Furthermore, Wood's Oberlin education made him not merely a profit-driven promoter, but also a writer whose progressive interests in championing western womanhood, acknowledging the West's ethnic pluralism, and involvement in non-partisan political activity seep into the opera.[91]

Identifying the work's composer, a Mr. William F. Hunt, has remained more elusive. This was likely the same Hunt associated with the Aiken & Hunt Company of Colorado Springs, listed in the 1879 city directory as dealers in pianos, organs, and sheet music. The 1880 census also identified a William Hunt, aged twenty-six years, as a piano tuner.[92] Unfortunately, as no score for the work has surfaced, the identity of Mr. Hunt is less germane than one would like to the present analysis of *Brittle Silver*; that is, with the exception of recognizing that the composer, like the singers he wrote for, was predominately avocational. No other known work is associated with his name, and no sheet music in printed or manuscript form is otherwise attributed to him, so William Hunt joins the ranks of the many other long-forgotten artists who participated in *Brittle Silver.*

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[90] M. James Kedro, "Stanley Wood, the Literary Artist as Western Promoter," *Red River Valley Historical Review* 2, no. 3 (1975): 393–411. For biographic and professional information on Stanley Wood, see additionally the work of Kedro, "Literary Boosterism!," *Colorado Magazine* 53, no. 3 (Summer 1975): 200–224, and Kedro, "Stanley Wood and the Great Divide: Rocky Mountain Literary Promotion in the Late Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Denver, 1977).

[91] For a fuller examination of Wood's education and politics, and their manifestations in his writing, see Kedro, "Stanley Wood, the Literary Artist as Western Promoter," 396.

[92] *Colorado Springs, Manitou and Colorado City Directory* (Colo. Spring: Tribe & Jefferay, Printers, Binders and Stationers, 1879), 38, 72.

Drawing on programs and part of an extant broadsheet, Table 4 identifies members of the Colorado Opera Club, the roles they were assigned in *Brittle Silver*, and their professions.

Table 4 Amateur Cast of the Colorado Opera Club's 1882 production of *Brittle Silver*.

Character	**Performer**	**Performer's Occupation**[93]
Jack Drillsby, a poor prospector	Will S. Ingersoll	Carpenter.
Keno Bill, a gambler, but honest	Dave J. Kelley	Clerk, Denver & Rio Grande Railway.
Hon. Ezekiel Bogus, a rich mine owner	Myer Harrison	With Joseph H. Harrison, cigars.
Sumendepotowatomie, chief of the Uncompagrhe Utes	F. J. Stevenson	Clerk, Edgard Leonard.
Bob Whim, an independent naturalized American citizen	Norman Maclean	Boards at American House.[94]
Capt. Bomb, of the Mining Guards	J. Orlo Rogers	None listed. Resided at 307 23rd Street.
Prof. Pollycarp P. Pillycamp, a scientific and sentimental crank	Will H. Kohnle	Clerk, post office.
Clarinda, daughter of Bogus, in love with Jack	Mrs. A. L. Slaght	Resided at 267 Lincoln Ave.
Broncho Kate, a maid of the mountains	Miss Annie Weigel	Teacher of music. Resided at 272 20th Street.
Jessie, a lady of "culchaw" from the "Hub"[95]	Miss Flora Collins	Resided at 587 Champa.
Conductor	Abe Kaufmann	Leader orchestra, Tabor Grand. Resided at 505 Champa.
Pianist	Benjamin Owen	None listed.
Stage Director	Lewis Parker	Mining machinery.
Manager, Colorado Opera Club	Chas. Gensler	Travel agent.
Mechanical Effects	J. C. Alexander	Stage carpenter, Tabor Grand.
Properties	Henry Coleman	Works, Tabor Grand.

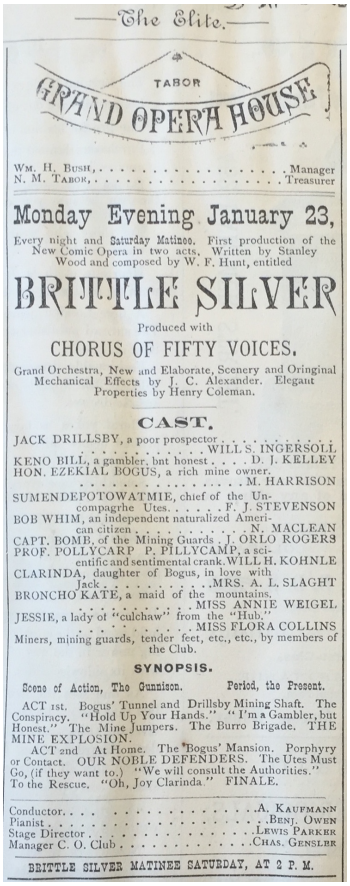
These amateurs included William Ingersoll, who worked during the day as a carpenter and sang the role of Jack; D. J. Kelly, a clerk for the railway, sang Keno Bill; Myer Harrison, who operated a cigar and tobacco store, performed the role of Ezekiel Bogus; and Sumendepotowatomie was sung by F. J. Stevenson, whose employer Edgar Leonard—a

[93] Compiled from Corbett, Hoye & Co.'s, *1881 9th Annual Denver City Directory* (Denver: Tribune Association), and Corbett, Hoye & Co.'s, *1882 10th Annual Denver City Directory* (Denver: Tribune Association).

[94] Based on the 1882 city director, the American House was a particularly popular boarding house with men employed by railway firms; indeed, the house was integrated, and accommodated no fewer than five African American railway porters and conductors, a common vocation for African American men in the West.

[95] "A lady of culture from the big city." See Albert Barrère and Charles G. Leland, *A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon and Cant* (London: George Bell, 1897), 160.

purveyor of “hats and caps, masonic and furnishing goods”—sponsored an advertisement on the first page of the show’s playbill. Clarinda was sung by an individual identified only as Mrs. A. L. Slaght, whose husband was likely the attorney Arthur Slaght, and lived in the Baker Neighborhood, which still boasts the greatest number of middle-class Queen Anne-style homes in Denver. Bronco Kate, a close friend of the heroine, was performed by Miss Annie E. Weigel—a teacher of music, according to the 1882 city directory, who resided with her brother, a physician, and his wife, a German instructor in Denver’s public schools. The company’s manager was Chas Gensler, a travel agent by day, who facilitated the activities of an amateur opera company that sang about the beauty of Colorado.



The Elite.

TABOR
GRAND OPERA HOUSE.

WM. H. BUSH, ... Manager
N. M. TABOR, ... Treasurer

Monday Evening January 23,

Every night and Saturday Matinee. First production of the New Comic Opera in two acts, Written by Stanley Wood and composed by W. F. Hunt, entitled

BRITTLE SILVER

Produced with

CHORUS OF FIFTY VOICES.

Grand Orchestra, New and Elaborate, Scenery and Oringinal Mechanical Effects by J. C. Alexander. Elegant Properties by Henry Coleman.

CAST.

JACK DRILLSBY, a poor prospector . . . . . WILL S. INGERSOLL
KENO BILL, a gambler, but honest . . . . D. J. KELLEY
HON. EZEKIAL BOGUS, a rich mine owner. . . . . M. HARRISON
SUMENDEPOTOWATMIE, chief of the Uncompagrhe Utes. . . . . F. J. STEVENSON
BOB WHIM, an independent naturalized American citizen . . . . . N. MACLEAN
CAPT. BOMB, of the Mining Guards . J. ORLO ROGERS
PROF. POLLYCARP P. PILLYCAMP, a scientific and sentimental crank. WILL H. KOHNLE
CLARINDA, daughter of Bogus, in love with Jack . . . . . MRS. A. L. SLAGHT
BRONCHO KATE, a maid of the mountains. . . . . MISS ANNIE WEIGEL
JESSIE, a lady of “culchaw” from the “Hub.” . . . . . MISS FLORA COLLINS
Miners, mining guards, tender feet, etc., etc., by members of the Club.

SYNOPSIS.

Scene of Action, The Gunnison. Period, the Present.

ACT 1st. Bogus’ Tunnel and Drillsby Mining Shaft. The Conspiracy. “Hold Up Your Hands.” “I’m a Gambler, but Honest.” The Mine Jumpers. The Burro Brigade. THE MINE EXPLOSION.

ACT 2nd At Home. The Bogus’ Mansion. Porphyry or Contact. OUR NOBLE DEFENDERS. The Utes Must Go, (if they want to.) “We will consult the Authorities.” To the Rescue. “Oh, Joy Clarinda.” FINALE.

Conductor. . . . . A. KAUFMANN
Pianist . . . . . BENJ. OWEN
Stage Director . . . . . LEWIS PARKER
Manager C. O. Club . . . . . CHAS. GENSLER

BRITTLE SILVER MATINEE SATURDAY, AT 2 P. M.

Figure 19 Dramatis personae of *Brittle Silver* playbill page from 23 January 1882 in *The Elite*, published for the Tabor Grand Opera House by George D. Betts. (History Colorado, Hart Research Center, Theatre programs.)

Without question, the sociability of the Colorado Opera Club's members extended beyond the confines of the group's activities. Much can be said of the activities of Annie Weigel and Dave Kelley (see Figures 20 & 21), whose acting "was intensely realistic . . . especially in the love scenes."[96] After successfully establishing his name in the city, Kelley along with his brother William opened a new saloon, the St. Julien on 15th Street, which earned its reputation with card players and sports gamblers. Along with Chas Gensler, the Kelley brothers started a baseball league under the city's sponsorship, and had a winning summer season against Golden and Colorado Springs. In late April, Dave Kelley married Annie Weigel in a private ceremony at her home. Since Father Bender, the city's German-Catholic priest, was already at the house, Annie's sister Teresa decided to make the most of the day, and married Dave's brother William.[97] Pastimes, be they sports or theatrical productions, were quickly becoming a family affair in Denver, the associational networks strengthening themselves on and off the stage.

Figures 20 & 21 Left: A. E. Rinehart photograph of Annie Weigel as "Bronco Kate" in *Brittle Silver*, 1882. Right: Dave Kelley as Koko in the Broad Opera Company's production of *The Mikado*, 1885. (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, uncatalogued folder Denver–Music.)

[96] "The Local Stage, Successful Week's Run of *Brittle Silver*," Denver *Republican*, 29 January 1882, 8.

[97] The baseball league was announced in *RMN*, 1 March 1882, 4; the announcement of the Kelley brothers marriage to the Weigel sisters appeared in "Two Weddings," *Republican*, 27 April 1882, 4.

The real-life Gunnison County—whose scenographic representation on the stage of the Tabor Grand elicited praise for the opera's "native landscapes"—was never particularly profitable as a mining outpost. Yet what Gunnison lacked in mineral riches it more than made up for in natural beauty. On that Monday evening in 1882, the plush curtains of the Tabor opened to reveal a sight with which many in the audience were intimately familiar: the upstage flies were hung with painted drops showing a mountain vista of towering peaks in the distance and two mining operations in the fore. Without speaking a word, the proximity of these two mines to each other introduces the central antagonisms of the opera: class conflict, the region's political economy, and as we eventually learn, debates about indigenous land rights. An entrance at the right side of the stage was masked by standing scenic pieces, which depicted a horizontal passage entering a mine that the audience knew to associate with a lucrative and well-funded mining operation.[98] This is the entrance to the Brittle Silver Mine, owned by Ezekiel Bogus, the "rich and hard-hearted father of the story." Opposite stands a curb and windlass—machinery used in excavating, shoring-up, and removing ore from a vertical mine shaft—associated with an under-funded and less lucrative operation.[99] This impoverished set-up belongs to Jack, a young man who is new to Gunnison country, and who, as the libretto informs us, has "poor prospects" and has yet to strike "the contact and gone through porphyry"—meaning that he has found nothing of value at his small claim and is poor.

The silly and even suggestive naming of characters likely reflected Wood's desire to make the work accessible and familiar, and presents the moral of the work with comic

[98] Rossiter Worthington Raymond, *A Glossary of Mining and Metallurgical Terms* (Easton, PA: American Institute of Mining Engineers), 3. Description of the scenography is taken from the libretto printed in the *Denver Tribune*.

[99] Raymond, *A Glossary of Mining and Metallurgical Terms*, 27, 76, 93. Examples of both kinds of mines—shaft and adit—still dot the slopes above Colorado's ghost towns, giving an indication of the dreams made and broken wherever they are found.

obviousness. The Honorable Ezekiel Bogus, for example, is a counterfeit and imposter of his namesake, the Old Testament prophet who directed the restoration of stolen lands and goods to the people of Israel, and honors and strengthens his employees in his mines only as far as it is beneficial to him.[100] On the other hand, Bronco Kate—whose half-tamed characterization is patently based on popular representations of Annie Oakley circulating within a year of her shooting match with Frank Butler—is an independent woman whose moral insights sustain the under-dog Jack and pacify the corruptibility of the gambler in love with her, Keno Bill.

The action begins with a chorus of miners entering the stage from Bogus's mine, dressed—we can imagine—in Levi's jeans and cruiser jackets and carrying pickaxes and shovels, as well as crow and tamping bars. As these sourdoughs enter the stage, the aurality of the mine becomes audible in the opera house, which the opening chorus explores in poetic verse:

> Deep within the hollow earth,
> Where the silver has its birth,
> Toiling, moiling all the day—
> But with spirits ever gay—
> Sturdy miners wield the pick,
> Click, click, click, click,
> List' to its melodious click;
> Hark, our brothers in the mine,
> With the merry chorus join,
> Click, click, click.

Certainly, some of the chorus members had at one time or another wielded a pick or panned rivers for their fortune. By beginning with this ensemble, the opera introduces its audience not

[100] In naming the central antagonist "Ezekiel Bogus," Wood is revealing some of his own beliefs on land rights and profiteering. Ezekiel would otherwise be an upright and noble name for a capitalist leader. The prophet Ezekiel instructed penitents to return stolen lands and objects to their rightful owners, and restore that which was gotten by violence; see Ezekiel 33:15, King James Bible: "If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die." Ironically, the prophet Ezekiel also predicted the destruction of Jerusalem by the Philistines, and its future restoration to the people of Israel through hope and salvation, similar to the observations and actions of Sumendepotowatomie in *Brittle Silver*, something of a redistribution of the prophet's prerogative to the "noble savage."

only to a group of singing and dancing miners—which seems about as likely as Gilbert and Sullivan's rollicking band of pirates—but also a choral fraternity, a harmony that was neither uncommon nor unfamiliar in both mine tunnels and Denver's social halls. Embedding the rhythms and onomatopoetic "Click, click, click" of the mine transports the echo of that fraternity from the cosmopolitan stage and into remote mountain towns—to Leadville, Blackhawk, Golden, and Gunnison—which secured the fortune of Colorado as the patron silver-king Horace Tabor, who used his wealth to build the opera house that bore his name and in which this audience enjoyed this very performance. The cacophony of the mine is rhythmicized; its rhythm has become the heartbeat of Colorado's economy, and the industrial city's audiences revel with their "brothers in the mine." For Coloradans in the audience, this was a musical celebration of the everyday; for visitors to the city, this was novelty, a performance of the eccentric civic pride that ran deep in Denverites.

Following the opening chorus, we are introduced to Ezekiel Bogus. He sings an aria with chorus in which he states that although he is of the "upper ten . . . his heart still bleeds for working men."[101] His spurious kinship with the miners, however, is revealed when he admits in the second verse, "My fellow citizens. I much regret to say, / That I'm compelled to circumscribe your pay." To which the miners reply: "Hurray! Hurray! for he regrets to say, / That he's compelled to circumscribe our pay." Colorado and especially the high mountain towns were still smarting from an 1880 strike by Irish miners in Leadville, which Horace Tabor had personally subdued by funding a vigilance committee under martial law. Whether the fictitious miners singing "Hurray! Hurray!" were a band of Janus-faced Molly Maguires waiting to turn on the

[101] "Upper ten thousand" or just "upper tenth" was a nineteenth-century phrase used to describe a small portion of the American aristocracy with similar pejorative connotations to the twentieth-century phrase "the 1%."

boss, or truly submissive employees, is left to the audience's imagination. The reference also makes a serious, albeit considerably veiled, challenge to the authority of any mine owner seated in the audience. We can only speculate as to how Horace Tabor felt about this cartoonish representation of his kind. Nevertheless, Bogus's employees recognize that he is cutting their wages to invest in new mines, therefore extending his mining operations and the number of available jobs. Again, he expresses his regret, and indicates that there is more making him sorrowful, which begins an exchange with his foreman Bob Whim:

> Bogus—. . . I almost envy you, for the humblest one of your number is a happier man than I am.
>
> Bob—I am sorry to hear it sir, and I say it boldly, for I am a free and independent American citizen.
>
> Bogus—Indeed you are. Free speech, free press, freedom. These are the birthrights of every American.
>
> Chorus—Hurray! hurray!
>
> Bogus—That is, within certain limits: of course, certain limits.

Naturally, those "certain limits" pertained to his belief in class separation, especially when it came to his daughter's interest in a fledgling miner.

In a second aria, Bogus reveals the source of his melancholia. He suspects that a poor prospector is in love with his daughter. This does not please him and introduces the class conflict between Bogus and Jack that propels the opera's plot. Jack is poor, "Sinkin' that yere prospect hole thar," as Bob puts it, "He's got no show, though." Bob asks if Bogus has reason to believe that Clarinda is interested in the young prospector; Bogus replies: "I'm afraid he has a small claim." Extrapolating the reference to a claim, or a parcel to which a miner has the right of possession and the right to extract discoverable minerals, the chorus then sings "Jump it, jump it, that's that way. . . . Thus you can paralyze this working man." Mine jumping was among the

most disreputable actions that one miner could commit against another. The forcible seizure of one's claim by another miner was prohibited extensively by codes and laws instituted at the federal and local level. By jumping Jack's mine, Bogus will not only ensure that he makes no gain off of his claim, but also that because of his poverty he will have no means to "make a claim" on Clarinda's affections. Terms that are doubly productive for the hard-hearted Bogus, and doubly devastating—romantically and financially—for poor Jack.

After Bogus and the chorus of miners have exited, Sumendepotowatomie, chief of the Uncompahgre Utes, cautiously enters the scene, and describes how he came to be a member of the "pleasant class of talking men" in, but of course, a solo that fits the mold of a patter song:

> Oh, my name is Sumendepotowatomie,
> And I'm chief of the Uncompahgre Utes,
> On the paleface I have practiced much phlebotomy,
> But now I have abandoned such pursuits.
> No longer do I joy in tomahawking men,
> My scalping knife I use for peeling fruit
> I'm a member of the pleasant class of talking men
> Who talk, talk, talk but never shoot.
>
> My revolvers and my new repeating rifle here
> I carry, just from habit, that's a fact,
> But my peaceful disposition was a trifle dear,
> It was purchased with a missionary tract:
> For once, when dying of starvation here,
> A paleface took pity on the Ute,
> And presented me with this religious *souvenir*,[102]
> So I talk, talk, talk, but never shoot.

Wood's description of Sumendepotowatomie as the chief of the Uncompahgre Utes is essential to the story, and deeply entrenches the themes of this comic-romantic opera within the context of

[102] Perhaps the italicized print suggests a French accent on this word, which would only further characterize Sumendepotowatomie's learnedness.

settler-indigenous affairs of the early 1880s. That he enters reading a tract of religious legalese is also far from inconsequential, especially for Jack.

The Ute (\'yüt\)—a Native American people that live primarily in Colorado and Utah, the latter of which is named for them—were (before their removal) a migratory nation, whose name means "people of the mountain."[103] At the time of Colorado's admission as a state in 1876, new agreements had seriously curbed white settlement of Indian country. Among these was Ulysses S. Grant's commitment of twelve million acres to the Utes in the western part of the state, of which Gunnison County was part, being equivalent to one-third of the state's landmass as we know it today. In response, Colorado's governor Frederick W. Pitkin and his staff began preparing articles for publication around the country headlined, "The Utes Must Go!" Tensions between the nation and settlers led to the devastating Meeker Massacre in 1879, and passage of the "Ute Removal Act" in 1880 that confiscated the twelve million acres granted the nation just three years earlier.[104]

Chief Sumendepotowatomie is a specter of these events and their politics; a memory of the culture and people who had occupied the Western Slope of Colorado for centuries, and who were rapidly being erased. As a member of the Uncompahgre band of Utes, however, the chief had a legally vested right to the land on which Bogus has staked his mining claim. Revelation of

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[103] A brief history of the Ute people is given in Steven L. Danver, ed., *Native Peoples of the World: An Encyclopedia of Groups, Cultures and Contemporary Issues: An Encyclopedia of Groups, Cultures and Contemporary Issues* (London: Routledge, 2015), 502. A new documentary history of the Ute people and their present nation was recently released, which was not reviewed for this analysis, but deserves recognition; see Sondra G. Jones, *Being and Becoming Ute: The Story of an American Indian People* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019).

[104] Peter Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West* (New York: Knopf, 2016), see esp. ch. 18 "The Utes Must Go," 341–357; Peter R. Decker, *The Utes Must Go! American Expansion and the Removal of a People* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2004); Robert Emmitt, *The Last War Trail: The Utes and the Settlement of Colorado* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954); Mark E. Miller, *Hollow Victory: The White River Expedition of 1879 and the Battle of Mill Creek* (Niwot: University of Colorado Press, 1997).

this fact moves Bogus to lead a deployment of military guards to the refrain "All Utes must go!"—set this time to rollicking music instead of printed across headlines. But when through the first refrain of their chorus, the guards have all but forgotten the reason why the Utes "must go." Unsure, they strike a pose—an "attitude of reflection"—before Bogus hisses "You stupid idiots! Because the Utes must go, of course." Bogus is in a rhetorical and ethical bind, and bloviates in favor of tribal removal to secure his access to land and mineral rights. The musical, comedic treatment of the popular catchphrase brings out its falsity and the disgrace of settler domination.

Next, we meet Jack, who enters and finds Sumendepotowatomie, with whom he is already acquainted from another chapter in his life. They are, as Jack puts it, "old friends." In a second aria, we discover that Sumendepotowatomie would never forget the generous "pale face" who fed him, gave him moral counsel, and who gave him the religious tracts from which he has learned to read. "You can always count on Summy," he assures Jack. When Jack asks him why he is there, Sumendepotowatomie says that even the "crested jayhawk of the mountain" knows Jack is in trouble, that he is in love and in need of assistance. Jack is overjoyed, and sings an aria, which includes a line that the two take up as a duet: "In love there is no respect for either race, color or previous condition of servitude."[105] With echoes of the Fifteenth Amendment, they sing about the right to love regardless of class, from which Jack is presently disenfranchised on account of his social and financial status.

Then, appearing to be something of a non sequitur, we are introduced to a chorus of "tenderfeet" who are led into Gunnison County by Professor Polycarp P. Pillicamp, "a scientific and sentimental." Wood introduces in an ensemble the urbane members of this group: "First

[105] Compare the construction of this sentiment to language from the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: the "right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state *on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude*."

Singer—I came from Gotham, that wonderful city; Second Singer—I can from Boston, the universe hub; Third Singer—I came from London, enormous but gritty; Fourth Singer—And I can from Oshkosh, by gosh, I did, bub."[106] The act concludes with Pillycamp inadvertently detonating an explosive in Jack's mine, a technical feat that earned the theater's engineer J. C. Alexander rave reviews. In the explosion, Pillycamp discovers that the mine is filled with brittle silver, an easily extractable silver antimony sulfide, known more commonly as Stephanite. Jack is now phenomenally rich, except for Bogus's dubious plan to jump his claim.

The second act opens on a scene at the cottage of Bogus and Clarinda. He is relieved to discover that Keno Bill has "jumped" Jack's mine, causing Jack to leave his claim as Bogus proudly claims: "Destruction to my foe and may he ne'er return." To protect his dubiously acquired mine, Bogus calls in a chorus of armed guards. Seeing Sumendepotowatomie approach, however, the guards leave their posts and run away. Bogus is confronted by the chief:

> Bogus (terrified): I think I heard someone calling me. I'll just step into the house.
>
> Sumende.: Hold, Paleface! Return it to me.
>
> Bogus: Return what?
>
> Sumende.: My umbrella. You must have borrowed it when I wasn't looking. Absorbed in reading this tract I forgot to hang on to that umbrella. Of course you took advantage of my abstraction and abstracted my umbrella. Come now, hand it over. You can't have lent it or lost it in so short a time.
>
> Bogus: I assure you, sir, I haven't seen your umbrella.
>
> Sumende.: Oh, that's what they all say. Of course you've got it somewhere, and by the sacred totem of my ancestors I will wrest it from thee. Oh, here it is after all [finds it on ground]. I accept your apology. Good evening. [Spreads umbrella and exits reading tract.]
>
> Bogus: What an unpleasant individual he is! There is no longer any doubt about it—the Ute *must* go!

[106] Horace Tabor's wife Elizabeth "Baby Doe" McCourt Tabor was from Oshkosh, WI; likely this is a nod to her.

A scene debating the possession of an umbrella calls to mind the objects present in a painting by George Catlin. An anomaly among his images of Native Americans, it depicts in a double portrait the representative Wi-jún-jon (The Light) before and after a trip to Washington, DC in 1832. Catlin encountered The Light both on his way to and coming from his envoy in the East, and depicted his recollections of the Assiniboine in both instances: first, in his traditional clothing of goat skin with long plaits of hair falling from under a headdress, and in the later image, Wi-jún-jon clothed in a suit *en militaire* with epaulettes, utilizing a fan, walking toward the tipis in the background with a tightly rolled umbrella—and two bottles of whiskey sticking out of each pocket.[107] The exchange in *Brittle Silver* is humorous, to be sure, but it is anything but a benign exchange between Bogus and Sumendepotowatomie.

Figure 22 George Catlin, *Wi-jún-jon, Pigeon's Egg Head (The Light) Going to and Returning from Washington*, 1837–1839, oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., 1985.66.474.

[107] Benita Eisler, *The Red Man's Bones: George Catlin, Artist and Showman* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 105–107.

Thereafter, the action rapidly accelerates to the end of the opera. Jack, after having given up on ever reclaiming his little claim, discovers from Sumendepotowatomie that the tract he has been reading is a legal document. Acquired "in the compacts of 1880," this tract reveals that the land on which Bogus has staked his claim actually belongs to the Uncompahgre Utes as part of their sovereign nation. As it happens, Bogus has no right to the land, and Sumendepotowatomie can lease his rights to the land as he sees fit. Jack is then elated to find out that his kindness toward the chief has earned him recognition as the mine's new lessee at no expense. Prof. Pillicamp, the resident pedant, appears as the legal authority on the treaty, examines the paperwork, "consults the authorities," and finds that everything is accurate. Disqualified from his claim, Bogus sulks as Clarinda and Jack are wedded, and the miners—now working under Jack and Sumendepotowatomie's authority—sing a finale of the "Brittle Silver" chorus.

Not only is this final turn of events—Sumendepotowatomie's lawful injunction against Bogus—essential to the story's dénouement, but it is absolutely predicted; in fact, it was all but guaranteed from the moment he was introduced as "noble," the last of his nation, and inevitably good. The absence of an active, positive parental figure for either Jack or Clarinda opened the possibility for Sumendepotowatomie to act as the paternal figure who would authorize and bless their union. As Werner Sollors argued with respect to melodrama and other nineteenth-century art forms: "As cursing-blessing elders the Indians conveyed a sense of chosen peoplehood to the sentimental heroines and heroes as well as to the weeping readers and viewers of these fictions… [conveying] a sense of legitimacy to whites who imagined them."[108] This thematic intermingling helped justify white republicanism, especially as it related to a rebellious child against a parent,

[108] Werner Sollors, "Romantic Love, Arranged Marriage, and Indian Melancholy," *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 102–130.

or to extrapolate the metaphor, young America from Britain, and the former frontier from teeming cities. For Denverites, Jack or Clarinda's blessing by Sumendepotowatomie fantasied their own ancestral connection to the land, and sacralized their presence in the American West.

Denver's amateur musicians were a vital and essential part of the city's robust operatic culture, both as patrons and creators. Their interest in performing opera arose out of their loyal participation in the many choral organizations active in the city. Several of the singing societies examined in this study were bounded by identities of descent, ethnicity, gender, religion, or a combination. In addition to being social organizations, their objective was to promote recreational music-making within a community, and in doing so to sustain collective identities and interpersonal ties.

Musical associations consolidated their collectivity out of the wide-open American musical landscape that Richard Crawford described as an "arena in which a vast congeries of individuals and groups made music according to their own needs and musical tastes."[109] Initially, such groups performed a repertory not dissimilar from those of venerable and historically recognized institutions such as the Berlin Singakademie or Boston's Handel and Haydn Society. Repertory performed by some larger organizations included Haydn's *The Creation*, Handel's *Messiah*, or Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. Other smaller, secular-oriented organizations presented the first hearings in Denver of choruses by Verdi and Wagner. Eventually these groups navigated the complexities of staging complete performances of comic operas, such as the Savoy operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, as well as opera bouffes of Offenbach and others in translation. In this way

[109] Richard Crawford, "Foreword," in Gilbert Chase*, America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*, 3rd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), xv.

participants were exposed to the latest operatic fashions, and the city's bookstores and musical instrument dealers made regular customers out of those local musicians who were interested in cultivating a musical culture at home.

From the professional companies that visited the city, they learned new aesthetic benchmarks to which their opera productions could aspire. Each pursued these models in their own way. Organizers like Sabrina Dow and Stanley Wood led local musicians in developing organizations that would give their work—specifically their avocational performances of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and the Colorado-themed operetta *Brittle Silver*—the financial and social capital needed to make a successful go of their amateur opera productions. These efforts were aided by the connections that opera clubs made with local businesses to underwrite their productions, churches where they would recruit and rehearse their members, and the theaters and impresarios that would host and publicize their performances, despite almost sure financial loss.

Since first heard in Denver in 1879, amateur operatic societies had become social and cultural institutions in which the boundaries between leisure and work, or performance and real life, were comparatively weak and easily crossed. Through entering spaces that most other Denverites inhabited only as audience members, amateur musicians gained for themselves a voice to sing their place into the genealogy and identity of the urban frontier. They basked in the discontinuities from the everyday, made and broke alliances, strengthened pathways to the other parts of their existence, and gained for themselves and the city sociability and respectability. Ten years later, the same will be witnessed in Denver's first African American neighborhood, the Five Points neighborhood, later dubbed the "Harlem of the West."

CHAPTER FIVE

Opera Production and Denver's African American Community

Denver was first mentioned in the black press in 1859, when a reporter for the *National Era* out of Washington, DC. stated that the organization of the "democratic county" had been finalized, public buildings were going up, and there was "perfect harmony and order" among the miners; any free man could travel west and sell an ounce of gold every day for $20, the paper claimed.[1] Of course, the actual political and social climate for black people in the territory was not so straightforward, let alone welcoming. Black men were discriminated against as soon as they arrived; they were ghettoized to the banks of the ever-unpredictable Cherry Creek; with no representation on the vigilance committee, they were summarily beaten and killed; and Billy Marchand was rather proud to advertise that his saloon's pet monkey would not "shake hands with a darkey."[2] It is even possible that, as Lyle Dorsett and Michael McCarthy quipped in their history of Denver, the presence of black men was so inconsequential, and there were so few of them living in the Kansas Territory as of 1861, that lawmakers may have simply forgotten "to specifically deny black men the right to vote" in the territory's legal charters.[3]

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[1] *National Era*, 17 February 1859.

[2] Regarding the influence of the black press on westward migration and the living conditions for black men in early Denver, see Richard Junger, "'Thinking Men and Women who Desire to Improve our Condition': Henry O. Wagoner, Civil Rights, and Black Economic Opportunity in Frontier Chicago and Denver, 1846–1887," in *Voices from within the Veil: African Americans and the Experience of Democracy*, eds. William H. Alexander, Cassandra L. Newby-Alexander, and Charles H. Ford (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 152–159; Thomas J. Noel, *The City and the Saloon: Denver, 1858–1916*, 26; Dorsett and McCarthy, *The Queen City*, 52–53.

[3] Dorsett and McCarthy, *The Queen City*, 53.

There is perhaps an ounce of truth to this. The 1860 federal manuscript census identified a total of forty-six "black or mulatto" men and women living in Arapahoe County, Kansas Territory—a territory covering most of Colorado and western Kansas—and by the next census, the count had risen to only four hundred fifty. In both years, the number of "black or mulatto" people represented at most two percent of the overall territorial population. The earlier census counted merely fifteen men and eight women in Denver alone, which increased to 237 by 1870. With the "black exodus" from the South to the North and the Trans-Mississippi West beginning in 1879, the population in Denver between 1880 and 1890 more than doubled from 2,435 (6.8%) to 6,215 (5.8%), though this still reflects a decrease of one percent in relative terms of African American representation, even as Denver's population doubled overall.[4] Evidenced in the slight size of the black community—and its imbalance with the overall population—is the realization that most African Americans had no illusions as to whom the fortunes of the frontier were promised.

But a few black businessmen and leaders were not entirely without a voice. Governor Cummins's made a statement to the 1866 territorial legislature on the vitality of the African American community in Colorado, and his expectation that their calls for suffrage be supported:

> [African American settlers] came here in considerable numbers. . . . They brought their families, and have kept them here. The evidences of their industry, frugality and thrift, are to be seen in various part of the city of Denver—some of the finest property in town belonging to them. . . . Justice to the living, and gratitude to those who died that the nation might live, forbid that the state of things against which these petitioners protest, should longer prevail.[5]

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[4] George H. Wayne, "Negro Migration and Colonization in Colorado: 1870–1930," *Journal of the West* 15, no. 1 (1976): 102–120; Andrew R. Goetz and E. Eric Boschmann, *Metropolitan Denver: Growth and Change in the Mile High City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 42–47, 70–72.

[5] Excerpt of a letter from Governor Alexander Cummins regarding Denver's black citizens and suffrage to the Legislative Assembly, Territory of Colorado, 23 January 1866, in *Council Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Colorado*, 5th session (Central City, CO: Collier Miners' Registration Office, 1866), 89–92. Also quoted in William M. King's essay on territorial law and the exclusion of black children from territorial public

Cummins's statement was accompanied by a petition to the territorial legislative assembly from Misters Henry O. Wagoner, Albert Arbour, A. C. Clark, William C. Randolph, and William J. Hardin. A group of independent and civically minded barbers and wagon drivers, they stated on behalf of the "colored citizens of the territory":

> Many of our people migrated to this territory with a knowledge of the law of 1861, which gave us the same rights as to other citizens, and that we are now suffering from the unjust law of 1864, which deprives negroes and mulattoes of the right of citizenship. . . .

Their petition referenced the Territorial Law of 1861, which although it did not expressly enfranchise "colored citizens," it also did not expressly exclude them from the vote. Some African Americans believed that suffrage, along with access to education for their children, improved business prospects, and public equity, would be available to them in the West; as historian Quintard Taylor observed, this was their "last best hope" to escape racial oppression and economic exploitation.[6] That hope was quashed in March 1864, however, when Governor of the Territory of Colorado John Evans (despite his being a Lincoln Republican) signed a bill amending the law so that there would be no further question. To the definition of a qualified voter—any "male person of the age of twenty-one years, or upwards"—was appended the phrase "not being negroes or mulattoes."[7] As African American studies scholar William M. King observed of the mores, norms, and laws of white western settlers, they imposed in the place to

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schools, "Creating Opportunities to Train the Mind: Public Schooling for Afroamericans in Territorial Denver, Colorado, 1861–1873," *Colorado History* 15 (2008): 19–51.

[6] Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528–1990* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 17; see also Eugene H. Berwanger, *The West and Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981).

[7] From Mr. C. B. Haynes to the Legislative Assembly, Territory of Colorado, 9 March 1864, in *Council Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Colorado*, 3rd session (Denver: Byers and Dailey Printers, 1864), 224. Ironically, given politics in 2019, in the same communication to the legislature it was recommended that it was "due to our Spanish citizens that the laws be printed in their language, in order to enable them to become acquainted with their duties as citizens, and also by doing so more revenue can be derived from them."

which they relocated patterns of behavior dominant in the places they left, "regardless of what they [told] themselves about the new society they [sought] to create."[8]

The alliance of black community leaders was not without recourse. Civil-rights pioneers Henry Wagoner and William J. Hardin led the group during April 1866 in organizing a petition to Congress asking that statehood be refused "until the word *white* be erased from [Colorado's] Constitution." With their efforts financially backed by the phenomenally wealthy Barney Ford (a black hotelier with several properties in Colorado), the letter was signed by 137 black men; it earned the attention of Republican leaders, was quoted on the floor of the Senate, and was reprinted by Horace Greeley in the *Tribune*. Although their efforts were not rewarded immediately, in January 1867 the Territorial Suffrage Act was passed by the United States Congress, reading in part: "There shall be no denial of the elective franchise in any of the Territories of the United States, now or hereafter to be organized, to any citizen thereof on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."[9] On April 1, 1867, Hardin, Ford, Wagoner, and others cast their first ballots in a local school board election.[10]

Although small, the African American community in Colorado was vibrant, collective, and self-affirming in ways unfamiliar to our everyday imaginings of the American West. The persistent images of black cowboys and buffalo soldiers are stereotyped and one-dimensional. Few western black men and women were lone individuals on the prairie, cut loose from their communities. Rather, most strove to create a new, free existence in the West; to build institutions for education, worship, leisure, and commerce. Communal identities formed, cooperation with

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[8] King, "Creating Opportunities to Train the Mind," 24–25.

[9] "Territorial Governments," 39th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Globe* (1867): 381–82.

[10] Eugene H. Berwanger, "Hardin and Langston: Western Black Spokesmen of The Reconstruction Era," *Journal of Negro History* 64, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 101–115.

other westerners was attained, and some African Americans did believe that the West offered both economic opportunity and political freedom.[11]

Traditional narratives do not imagine the American West as a racially heterogeneous place, but as one staked out by white colonialists. Frederick Jackson Turner made no mention of African Americans in his 1893 thesis on the closing of the frontier; this was not because their presence challenged his thesis, but because, as William Katz noted, "[Turner] wrote in a tradition that had denied the existence of black people."[12] In short, the notion of a mythic frontier accompanied a lack of awareness of a multi-ethnic West, which misrepresented and disregarded African American experiences and contributions. Nor, for that matter, has nineteenth-century Colorado typically been thought of as a place where opera was a prized source of cultural uplift. This final chapter explores the confluence of these two phenomena: the production of opera in the Denver and the emergent African American community in the American West.

The mid-nineteenth-century African American experience in lyric theater was initially limited by and respondent to blackface minstrelsy. For some black American musicians, comedians, actors, and singers, portraying the stereotyped characters in the popular genre offered a point of entry for a career on the stage. Over time, these artists began to cultivate their own celebrity, and the novelty of hearing black singers in genres other than minstrelsy presented new (albeit infrequent) artistic opportunities, including their participation in art music and legitimate theater. Beginning with the remarkable career of Elizabeth Greenfield Taylor in 1851, black vocalists were sensationalized in the press, seen as transgressing boundaries of gender, class, and

[11] Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 103–132.

[12] William Loren Katz, *The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in the Westward Expansion of the United States* (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1987), xii; on literature and representations of the African American West, see Blake Allmendinger, *Imagining the African American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

especially race.[13] Both opera and minstrelsy were mainstream entertainments, performed by traveling troupes across the country, and marketed to middle-class audiences. Only one of them was expressly open to African American performers, however.

During Reconstruction, African American musicians began to redress the relationship between these two forms of theater, especially as artists such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Marie Selika Williams, Flora Batson, and Sissieretta Jones, among others, grew in prominence.[14] Some integrated vernacular musical traditions, minstrelsy, and opera in original works that celebrated blackness. Others rejected these traditions in an effort to create a "school" of black opera, legitimized by its similarities to European opera and its liberation from minstrelsy. In reference to the former, this chapter examines the Hyers Sisters' ballad opera *Out of Bondage* and its reception in Denver, which endeavored to legitimize operatic performance by African Americans by ensconcing it within genres that did permit them authorship. In the latter, I consider the first of many attempts made by Harry Lawrence Freeman in 1893 to present opera in his black community. Throughout both studies, it is important to bear in mind that African Americans had very few opportunities to perform complete operas, either in the original language or English translation, and their opportunities to experience opera were almost as limited.

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[13] Julia J. Chybowski, "Becoming the 'Black Swan' in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America: Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield's Early Life and Debut Concert Tour," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 67, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 125–165.

[14] On African American performers active in art music during the nineteenth century, see Katherine K. Preston, "A Rarefied Art? Opera and Operatic Arias as Popular Entertainment in Late-Century Washington City," in *Music, American Made: Essays in Honor of John Graziano*, ed. John Koegel (Sterling Heights, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2011), 3–46; Thomas L. Riis "Concert Singers, Prima Donnas, and Entertainers: The Changing Status of Black Women Vocalists in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Music and Culture in America, 1861–1918*, ed. Michael Saffle (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 53–78; and John Graziano, "The Early Life and Career of the 'Black Patti': The Odyssey of an African American Singer in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 543–596.

The Hyers Sisters and their Denver Following

In 1878, James Monroe Trotter recalled in his book *Music and Some Highly Musical People* the experience of hearing the Hyers Sisters, Anna Madah and Emma Louise, for the first time:

> The writer recalls with much pleasure the delightful emotions which . . . were awakened in his breast by the very graceful stage appearance and the divine harmony produced by these accomplished musicians. . . . he could not repress the thoughts that came forcibly into his mind, of not only how much these noble artists were doing for the cause of pure music, but for that other righteous one,—the breaking-down of a terribly cruel prejudice, founded on the accident, so to speak, of the color of the face.[15]

Trotter (1842–1892)—himself born in slavery and now employed by the federal government—was writing his history of African American musicians in Boston. His objective was to valorize black musicians whose achievements provided readers a sense of racial pride, and whose remarkability had escaped the attention of his readers because they were excluded from the dominant discourse on art. *Music and Some Highly Musical People* turned prevailing notions of civilization back on those who had used such definitions to suppress his ancestors.[16] Trotter's contribution to the "Negro history movement," the formal study of the black past following the work of George Washington Williams, was the first study, according to Eileen Southern, in which an author, black or white, "had attempted to assess a body of American music that cut across genres and styles."[17] Trotter included the Hyers Sisters to highlight not only their talents,

[15] James M. Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1878), 178.

[16] Lawrence Schenbeck, "James Monroe Trotter and His Forebears," chap. 1 in *Racial Uplift and American Music, 1878–1943* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2012). To Trotter's point about the erasure of African Americans from general histories, musical, cultural or otherwise, neither Sanford Linscome's "History of Musical Development in Denver" nor Henry Miles's *Orpheus in the Wilderness* make mention of Harry Lawrence Freeman in Denver, and Miles makes the egregious error of consistently referring to the Hyers Sisters as the "Hyatt" Sisters.

[17] Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 261; Raymond Gavins, "Negro History Movement," in *The Cambridge Guide to African American History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 210–11.

but also their noble mission to interweave both folk and art music, and to advance "pure" music—that is, music produced by trained musicians—that was enjoyed by racially diverse audiences.[18] Their graciousness and stylistic catholicity endeared the Hyers Sisters to audiences, and made them the most prized performers in Denver during the summer of 1879.[19]

The Hyers Sisters debuted at the Metropolitan Theatre in their hometown of Sacramento, California on April 20, 1867.[20] From the beginning they were regarded as a novelty not only because of the color of their skin, but also the exceptional quality of their voices. In the fall of 1871, when Anna Madah (1855–1925) was sixteen and Emma Louise (1857–1899) fourteen, they left California on the first of many cross-continental tours. Their foreign-language repertoire—recorded in reviews of concerts given in San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Cleveland, Boston, and New York City, among others—was remarkable. Anna Madah included Norma's "Casta diva," Violetta's "Ah, fors'è lui che l'anima," and Leonora's "D'amor sull'ali rosee." Emma Louise, whose solo repertoire was not as carefully catalogued as her sisters, specialized in character and folk songs; though in the sisters' duets from Donizetti's *Linda di Chamounix*, Verdi's *I masnadieri*, and Flotow's *Martha*, she would sing the tenor's role en travesti, a practice of gender ambiguity and play that filtered into their original works.[21]

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[18] Information for Trotter's sketch was secured from their father and manager, Samuel B. Hyers. Trotter quoted reviews of their concert tours, and many of the clippings (i.e., those from California) would have been otherwise unavailable to him in Boston. How Trotter gathered materials on the musicians in *Music and Some Highly Musical People* is posited in Eileen Southern, "An Early Black Concert Company: The Hyers Sisters Combination," in *A Celebration of American Music: Words and Music in Honor of H. Wiley Hitchcock*, ed. Richard Crawford, R. Allen Lott and Carol J. Oja (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 19.

[19] One season review referred to all other entertainments beside the Hyers Sisters that summer as "dull." "Season Amusements," *RMN*, 2 August 1879, 4.

[20] "Grand Vocal and Instrumental Concert," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 20 April 1867, 2. They received classical musical instruction in voice and piano from a German teacher during their adolescent years in Sacramento; despite many promises that they would travel to Europe to finish their training, there is no evidence to suggest that this opportunity had ever been afforded them. Lindsay Patterson, *The Negro in Music and Art*, 3rd ed. (New York: Publishers and Co., 1969), 180–181.

[21] Review from Salt Lake City's *Desert News*, 12 August 1871. For this and other reviews of the sisters' repertoire in 1871 and 1872, see Henry T. Sampson, *The Ghost Walks: A Chronological History of Blacks in Show Business,*

Figure 23 Emma Louise and Anna Madah Hyers, sketch by "Collier del," reproduced in Trotter's *Music and Some Highly Musical People.* (Harvard University, Harvard Theatre Collection, Theatrical portrait prints, Folder 936, TCS 43).

On the whole, the Hyers Sisters impressed audiences with their acting ability and vocal prowess, though white audiences did continue to have biases against their accomplishments, and struggled to make sense of them as mixed cultural markers. One writer from Salt Lake City's *Desert News*—a fantastically conflicted document when it came to race in the nineteenth century—critiqued Anna Madah singing "Ah, fors'è lui che l'anima." Reviewing the accuracy and facility of the performance with a score in hand, the critic finally concluded that, much to their surprise, "the intonation of the young artiste was perfect." They continued:

> I thought the face coloring was all humbug, merely introduced to please fashion, and that it was all a farce to expect such excellent renditions of musical compositions by our legitimate colored brethren and sisters. But I am ready to acknowledge, since I have listened to the Hyers Sisters' concerts, that I was in error, and that the colored portion of the human family are equitably able, with

1865–1910 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1988), 10–17. Jocelyn Buckner, "'Spectacular Opacities': The Hyers Sisters' Performances of Respectability and Resistance," *African American Review* 45, no. 3 (2012): 312.

> first rate cultivation, to render classical compositions as perfectly as the Italians, Americans, Germans or English.[22]

This anxiety was also ameliorated in how the Hyers Sisters were marketed. Anna Madah was compared to Jenny Lind and Euphrosyne Parepa-Rosa in advertisements, and one reviewer noted that a number of competent musicians from St. Joseph, Missouri (the rural South, of all places), "pronounced [her voice] perfectly wonderful."[23] Like Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield (the "Black Swan") before or Sissieretta Jones (the "Black Patti") after, promoters for the Hyers Sisters foregrounded these favorable comparisons to white, European prima donnas to help gain for them the respect, admiration, and patronage of audiences.[24]

By 1875, the Hyers Sisters had successfully entered a network of itinerant African American musicians touring rural and urban America, performing for white and black audiences with Callender's Georgia Minstrels (an all-black minstrel troupe), and also on independent concerts of foreign-language opera favorites.[25] Yet while the Hyers Sisters enjoyed an enthusiastic following, there existed no immediate opportunity for them to perform complete operatic works. Finding their way onto the lyric stage would require a careful navigation of genre-crossing between minstrelsy and opera.

The Hyers Sisters were promoted by the Redpath Lyceum Bureau of Boston, the only African American musicians represented by the company that managed the speaking

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[22] Salt Lake City *Deseret News*, 23 August 1871, 4. Racial attitudes and related practices of Mormonism changed with the election of every new leader—ranging from anti-abolitionist to anti-slavery, or often completely silent. On the Mormon press and race see Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, eds., *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 1–6.

[23] *St. Joseph Daily Herald*, 28 August 1871; quoted in Sampson, *The Ghost Walks*, 12–13.

[24] On racialized sobriquets for African American singers, see Chybowski, "Becoming the 'Black Swan' in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," 125, 143–145.

[25] Sandra Jean Graham, *Spirituals and the Birth of a Black Entertainment Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 107–109.

engagements of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington. The bureau was begun by abolitionist James Redpath, a journalist, booking agent, and activist who spoke alongside Douglass, denouncing apathetic Republican politicians for their hesitancy in enfranchising black voters. The American lyceum movement that came of age in the 1830s and 1840s had been crafted by ministers, educators, and businessmen, who arranged presentations across the country on topics deemed instructive and morally uplifting to the general population.[26] In the mid-1860s, however, lyceums were reoriented toward entertainment over education, and started to present humorists, opera troupes, instrumental ensembles, and other forms of popular entertainment.[27] Nevertheless, as Eileen Southern noted, their performances while under the bureau had to "differ sharply from the typical minstrel show" and represent an "abrupt break with the past."[28] In August 1875, Redpath printed a circular announcing the premiere during the following season of an "operetta" written expressly for the Hyers Sisters, *Out of Bondage*, "illustrative of the progress of the colored race."[29] This would be, the bureau claimed, the greatest dramatic and musical novelty of the centennial year, symbolizing the emergence from slavery to freedom.

Joseph Bradford—the white playwright assigned to the project by the time Redpath began advertising the season—was born into a slave-holding family near Nashville in 1843; after breaking ties with his family and fighting for the Union Army, he made his way to Boston to pursue a career in acting and playwriting. He devised a story that would feature the sisters in

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[26] John R. McKivigan, *Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 113–130; Paige Lush, *Music in the Chautauqua Movement: From 1874 to the 1930s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013), 129–131.

[27] On the lyceum movement during the post-bellum period and its inclusion of musicians, see Preston, *Opera for the People*, 245–251.

[28] Eileen Southern, introduction to *African American Theater: Out of Bondage (1876) and Peculiar Sam; or, The Underground Railroad (1879)*, ed. Eileen Southern (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), xvi.

[29] Circular of the Redpath Lyceum Bureau, August 1875, 6; reproduced in Southern, *African American Theater*, xl.

songs that had made them popular during their days singing with the Georgia Minstrels, as well as the operatic repertoire that had initially brought them acclaim in California. In publicizing the work, Redpath emphasized that it should not be confused with a minstrel show, but understood as "a high-class dramatic and musical entertainment, appealing to the most cultivated portion of the community as well as the general amusement seeker."[30] By definition, *Out of Bondage* is a ballad opera, in which spoken dialogue alternates with popular songs adapted for the purposes of the story. Bradford's text called for the inclusion of plantation, jubilee, and slave songs, which Redpath promised would be given in a manner that had never before been heard, as well as music of a "higher order," similar to the concerts of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, that would be "beautifully rendered and intelligently interpreted" by the company.[31]

Out of Bondage recast character types from minstrelsy to dramatize the Hyers Sisters' pursuit of a professional career as artists, instilled with their own celebrity and desire to distinguish themselves from minstrels.[32] Divided into three acts, each part of *Out of Bondage* was titled in the Redpath circulars: Slavery, Freedom, and Up North–Five Years After [Emancipation]. A typical synopsis reads:

> The first [act] represents the negro in his home in a state of bondage; the second, his admission to freedom by the approach of the Union army, and the parting of the young folks from the old, the former going North with the army, leaving the latter on the plantation; the third, after a separation of five years, the old folks come North and meet the young, who by this time have attained to affluence.[33]

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[30] Circular of the Redpath Lyceum Bureau, 1876–1877; reprinted in Southern, *African American Theater*, xl.

[31] Circular of the Redpath Lyceum Bureau, 1877–1878; reprinted in Southern, *African American Theater*, xli.

[32] Daphne Brooks has cited *Out of Bondage* as a metatextual production that signified "the social and political viability of a career in song," allowing the sisters to engage with the Reconstruction-era cultural reform undertaken by African American female artists including Pauline Hopkins (playwright and librettist), Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, and Sissieretta Jones, among others. See Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 313–314.

[33] *New York Clipper*, July 1876, 351. The premiere was given in Lynn, Massachusetts, on 20 March 1876.

The characters initially resemble stock figures encountered in literature and dramatic works of the time, especially *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as observed by Eileen Southern: the older, antebellum-born generation, comprised of Uncle Eph (reminiscent of Uncle Tom) and Aunt Naomi (reminiscent of Mammy), and the younger generation with Henry and Kaloolah, the young field hands played by Sam Lucas and Emma Louise, in addition to the female house servant Narcisse played by Anna Madah.[34]

Figure 24 Advertisement showing a scene from the first act of the "Great musical drama, 'Out of Bondage.' Only colored dramatic company in the world." Likely printed for the performance at the Boston Theatre during the week of August 20–25, 1877. (Boston Athenæum, Prints and Photographs Department, A T95-No. 2).

Importantly, the younger characters refuse to remain static or complacent in their stereotype in this slavery-to-freedom story. At the beginning, the text for Kaloolah is written in a phonetic approximation of a vernacular dialect; after she is freed and educated, her lines are written in standard English. Narcisse has already dropped the folk dialect and figures of speech

[34] Southern, *African American Theater*, ii.

at the beginning; by Act III, which is set in an elegant interior room in Boston, she speaks in terms that foreshadow philosophies of black intellectuals a decade later: "[We] have found that freedom does not mean idleness but labor. That neither man nor woman has any right to live in the world without striving to make it better."[35] For that matter, Uncle Eph is perplexed to see the younger characters wearing their Sunday clothes on a Thursday, and outright incredulous when he discovers that they do so because they have a performance that evening—that they make their living singing and playing the piano.

Not unlike other ballad operas, *Out of Bondage* welcomed flexibility in its musical numbers, though it seems a musical arranger for the production was never identified. Some of the performers' showpieces seem to have appeared consistently, including well-known popular songs to generate a sense of nostalgia for some patrons, and new character-driven numbers that acted as special vehicles for the stars who regularly reinvented and reworked the piece. For example, Sam Lucas, one of the most celebrated entertainers of his generation in minstrelsy, sang "Carve dat 'possum," a piece that he had made popular during his time with Callender's Minstrels, and which established his character's position in the family as a provider. "Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel," Stephen Foster's "My old Kentucky home," and popular anti-slavery ballads and spirituals were also featured. For Lucas and Emma Louise, Charles A. White (a Boston-based composer) wrote a new duet in minstrel guise, "Good bye, old cabin home," to accompany their departure from the South, in which Emma Louise sang the line "I'se gwine to be a Yankee, I is, as sure's you're born" (Figure 25). *Out of Bondage* provided the troupe with

[35] Joseph Bradford, *Out of Bondage*, reprinted in Southern, *African American Theater*, 52. This line seems an echo from Booker T. Washington's Sunday evening talks; for example, on 13 May 1900, he delivered these lines: "I feel very sure that the weakness of our race is in the large cities and towns. . . . Idleness leads to immorality, it leads to sin, and following in the wake of idleness in the large cities is physical weakness;" quoted in Michael Rudolph West, *The Education of Booker T. Washington: American Democracy and the Idea of Race Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 108–109.

opportunities to lampoon plantation life and minstrel stereotypes, while also giving them the chance to demonstrate the full range of their musical abilities.

Figure 25 Cover of "Good bye, old cabin home" showing a rusticated and abandoned cabin in a subtropical climate, lithograph by John H. Bufford & Sons (Boston: White, Smith & Co., 1877). (Boston Public Library, Music, M.482.26).

Out of Bondage has no finite ending. It closes with an invitation for the artists to perform a grand concert. From the 1876 Redpath circular, we know that Lucas offered "Shivering and shaking out in the cold"—Lucas's slow, pathos-filled ballad modeled on the white cultivated song tradition, which describes impoverished living in urban society. The song—which, as Sandra Graham has noted, breaks with the thematic and stylistic features of the minstrel songs that had made him famous—was modelled on parlor songs in standard English, and made no

explicit mention of race.[36] Also from the 1877 Redpath circular, we know that Anna Madah and Emma Louise returned to their operatic roots for the concert, offering selections from *Il Trovatore* and *Ernani*. The Hyers Sisters continued to perform *Out of Bondage* across the country for about fifteen seasons with various combination companies, and many reviews suggest a continuous inclusion of their early opera-concert repertoire. This led one reviewer in Iowa to state: "[the concert] showed that the troupe, in voice and culture, could compare with any of their white brethren and sisters in the successful rendition of the best and most difficult music."[37] *Out of Bondage* resisted stereotypes of black performance to create a work that avoided cultural transgression, while allowing the Hyers Sisters to use art music to communicate racial equality and respectability.

The Hyers Sisters first brought *Out of Bondage* to Denver in early February 1879, along with another ballad opera described as an "opera bouffe," *Urlina, the African Princess*, the first known stage show created by African Americans to be set in Africa.[38] Two performances were given at the Forrester Opera House, with tickets at the "standard prices": 50 cents for seats in the gallery, 75 cents for the dress circle, and one dollar for orchestra seats. These were the same prices charged to see the great tragedian Lawrence Barrett play Hamlet and Julius Caesar later that season.[39] Regarding these first performances, the Denver press was silent. They returned in

[36] On the racial coding of Sam Lucas's songs see Sandra Jean Graham, "Composing in Black and White: Code-Switching in the Songs of Sam Lucas," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Censorship*, ed. Patricia Hall (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). Lucas remained with the Hyers Sisters company through the 1877 season, at which time he left to become the first black performer to reclaim the title character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on stage, and its 1914 adaptation for film by William Robert Daly.

[37] *Muscatine Iowa Journal*, 22 May 1877; quoted in Circular of the Redpath Lyceum Bureau, 1877–1878, 72.

[38] On the racial uplift and pride in *Urlina, the African Princess*, see Buckner, "'Spectacular Opacities': The Hyers Sisters' Performances of Respectability and Resistance," 318–322.

[39] *RMN*, 1 February 1879, 1; *RMN*, 15 July 1879, 1.

July of that year, however, and received a warm welcome and much attention from various groups and newspapers across the city.

It seems that prior arrangements were not made for their return in July 1879, and so they spent two weeks in Denver offering impromptu concerts, performing in storefronts for city and state politicians, and mingling with both patrons and performers associated with Denver's local minstrel troupe and the black community.[40] On a Thursday evening, the Hyers Sisters joined the "Denver Colored Troupe" in a benefit concert for a black church at the Young Men's Christian Association's Hall. Emma Louise sang "The Last Rose of Summer," and Anna Madah offered Leonora's so-called "Miserere" scene, "Quel suon, quelle preci." A Mr. Fred Lyons—identified as a barber in the city directory—also offered an unidentified solo that was "heartily encored."[41]

With dates at the Forrester Opera House still not secured for their season, a group of admirers tendered them a benefit and came to their aid to secure a venue. The Hyers Sisters accepted the invitation, which was signed by some of Colorado's most recognizable names: Pitkin, Londoner, Sopris, Byers, Daniels, and nineteen other businessmen and officials of major standing in the region.[42] Their efforts won over Nate Forrester, and he arranged for the theater to be available to the troupe for three days in early August 1879, at the expense of one of the local amateur opera companies and their rehearsals of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. The benefit performance of *Out of Bondage* was welcomed by a full house, which happened to be much different than the

[40] The Hyers Sisters' impromptu concert at Montelius's bookstore, which was given "to the gratification of an admiring audience of state officials," was reported in "Sweet Music," *RMN*, 17 July 1879, 1.

[41] "Last Night's Hyers Sisters' Concert," *RMN*, 26 July 1879, 8; *1879 Corbett, Hoye & Co.'s 7th Annual Denver City Directory*, 169. This performance with the "Denver colored troupe" is the only performance by the Hyers Sisters in 1879 identified in Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 203.

[42] Frederick Pitkin, second Governor of Colorado; Wolfe Londoner, president of the Denver Press Club; Richard Sopris, mayor of Denver; William Byers; William Bradley Daniels, proprietor of Daniels and Fisher Department Store, whose tower complex remains a distinctive historic landmark located in downtown Denver.

array of empty seats that had greeted the "dull entertainments" recently presented at the opera house. Anna Madah proved to be better than "any musical attraction Denver has had in many months," with a voice of exquisite sweetness that "renders any operatic selection with the best effect."[43] The performance was a great success for the combination company, and saw them off on a week-long tour of mountain towns, including Central City and Leadville, before they returned east.

In *Out of Bondage*, the Hyers Sisters leveraged their celebrity and musical talent to gain backing from producers and theater managers across the country. Through subsequent works, the sisters overtly celebrated their blackness onstage, while their efforts also contributed to opportunities for other African American artists working within and apart from the jubilee circuits. The Hyers Sisters were among the few performers who pried open lyric theater to lead the way for future generations of black Americans to perform and create operas representative of their humanity, experience, and respectability.

Harry Lawrence Freeman and the African American Community of 1890s Denver

"My father could not whistle 'Home Sweet Home,'" began Harry Lawrence Freeman's 1925 response to a questionnaire received from Edward Ellsworth Hipsher, "but on the other hand my mother possessed a very beautiful voice." A regular contributor to *Etude* and an editor for Theodore Presser Company, Hipsher was preparing his study of the "history of serious American opera," *American Opera and Its Composers*.[44] Freeman (1869–1954) included in his response to Hipsher a story he remembered his aunt sharing in her valedictorian speech. The

[43] "The Hyers Sisters," *RMN*, 1 August 1879, 8.

[44] Edward Ellsworth Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Co., 1927), 189–195.

parable was of a great sculptor who, after giving the best years of his life to a single work, was awarded a place of honor in a hall of fame. On the night before the sculpture was to be revealed, the artist noticed a single flaw, which he could easily correct. He raised his tools for one gentle blow, struck, "and lo! the entire monument lay at his feet, shattered into thousands of fragments!" Freeman used the story to describe his present musical activities, which he related to the parable thus: "In the construction of my operas you will probably be able to note certain climaxes of similar tendencies." It had been thirty-three years since he penned his first musical manuscripts, and already he had eleven operas completed, with nine more to come over the next twenty years. Yet despite his prolific output and a life dedicated to music and music education, Freeman was well aware that the reason for his obscurity and inhibited efforts was found in another answer on the same questionnaire: "Nationality—Negro."[45]

Freeman's biography before he moved to Harlem in 1909 is less straightforward, and largely founded on stories he perpetuated of himself. Regrettably, he was not observed to the extent other prolific composers were, and as he was essentially an auto-didact, official documents such as school records or social club reports are few and far between. Much of what we know comes from the sketch he sent to Hipsher, various articles that appeared in newspapers across the country throughout his career, a syndicated column he wrote around 1900, and the scrapbooks and other personal documents available in his collection at Columbia University.

Freeman was born on October 9, 1869, to Sylvester Lemuel and Agnes Sims Freeman in Cleveland, Ohio.[46] His father was a carpenter, and his mother—who died when he was a child—

[45] "Typed manuscript response to Mr. Edward Ellsworth Hipsher," H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, 1870–1982, Box 49, Folder 3, Series IV, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Hipsher chose not to include Freeman's melancholic parable of his career in his chapter on the composer.

[46] Freeman did occasionally give his birth year as 1875, e.g., in his response to Hipsher, which was subsequently repeated in other early biographies, before Celia Davidson corrected this in her dissertation.

kept house and was remembered for her singing ability, which she contributed to their church. As of the 1880 federal manuscript census, Freeman and his father were living in the Sims's family home at 686 Sterling Avenue.[47] Henry Sims, Agnes's father, had "walked away from slavery," as Freeman recalled, and was employed as a plasterer and mason; his wife, Mary Louisa Sims, kept house. It was to Mary Louisa that Freeman dedicated his opera, *The Martyr*.

The census also identified Harry Lawrence Freeman and his father's race as white, while his grandfather Henry was listed as mulatto and grandmother Mary Louisa as black. Before the "one-drop" rule rigidly marked the boundaries of racial identification at the depths of Jim Crow, the phenomenon of "passing" referred to a light-skinned person deciding to live as a white person, or who was identified as such by census takers.[48] Passing, as Allyson Hobbs has suggested, was "an anxious decision to turn one's back on a black racial identity" in an effort to escape political disenfranchisement, social intimidation, and economic deprivation. But loss was the prerequisite for passing; family and social loss, loss of heritage, isolation, even exile from a community.[49] Although in Freeman's case it was not permanent, the personal reasons (or even the clerical error) that led his father to identify his eleven-year-old son as "white" to the census taker cannot be known. However, in Freeman's life, music, and writing, it is evident that he identified proudly as a black man, and used the collective identity of the black artists and

[47] Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, "Tenth Census of the United States, 1880," roll 1006, 84A, enumeration district 019. Henry Sims built that home at 686 Sterling Avenue fifteen years earlier; in the interim, the neighborhood had developed into a well-to-do African American hamlet in the city, and was bounded to the south by the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church, where John D. Rockefeller worshipped, and where Freeman sang as a child.

[48] On race categorization in the censuses, the importance of legal definitions to the racial identification asserted by Americans, and discourses around "race science" conducted using the U.S. censuses, see Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 43–62.

[49] Allyson Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 15–18, 230.

community around him to recover a personal and collective past, a genealogical narrative, that had been subdued and stolen by the dehumanizing institution of chattel slavery.

When Freeman was seven, his family noticed that he could "pick out songs of all kinds of melodies by ear" and was able to harmonize them depending on the "mood of the moment." His musical abilities were cultivated by teachers in Cleveland's public schools, where he organized and directed a boy's quartet. Even so, his musical activities centered around the family's church, Mount Zion Congregational Church, where he became the organist at age twelve.[50] Participatory musical experiences and the education available through the church played a major role in Freeman's development. His community was structured around the church; it functioned as a school, social club, lyceum, and gymnasium, where musical, visual, literary, and dramatic arts were displayed proudly to the community. It was, as Eric Lincoln observed of the Black Church broadly, the "*sanctum sanctorum*," a place where leaders were raised and its members were endowed with "the courage to be creative in the face of their own dehumanization."[51] The significance of this community stuck with Freeman. In the early 1910s, after he left work as bandmaster at Chicago's black-owned vaudeville Pekin Theatre and before he moved to New York City, Freeman returned to Mount Zion Congregational in Cleveland to lead the music and music education program.[52]

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[50] Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers*, 189; many of these points were confirmed in Freeman's obituary, "H. L. Freeman, 84, Composer Is Dead," *New York Times*, 26 March 1954, 22.

[51] C. Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma*, 2nd ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 72–73.

[52] On Freeman's time at the Pekin Theater, see Henry T. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface: A Sourcebook on Early Black Musical Shows* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2014), I:81–83; on Mt. Zion Congregational Church, see Jack Salzman, David L. Smith, and Cornel West, eds., *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History* (New York: Macmillan Library Reference, 1996), II:596. Other great milestones for Freeman were not logged. A college education (if he had one) was not a prominent part of how he developed as a composer—though he did instruct music at Wilberforce University from 1902 through 1904—and he credited as his only composition teacher Johann Beck, leader of various municipal ensembles before the founding of the Cleveland Orchestra in 1918. Little is known of his devoted home life, other than his wife Carlotta was a singer, and their son, Valdo, was both the namesake for one his most consuming operas (which was set in an imaginary African Texas-Mexico borderland), a

Few references to Freeman exist in the Denver white press—though, maybe there are more than could be expected for a young African American man who lived in the city for only three years—and regrettably, no pertinent copies of Denver's weekly black newspaper the *Statesman* (1889–1906) remain. Nevertheless, extant sources such as directories, housing and church records, and news clippings do confirm details Freeman gave in his own autobiographical writings, and draw a fuller picture of his time in Denver and the beginning of his work in opera.

Figure 26 Harry Lawrence Freeman (1869–1954), c. 1895. (Columbia University Libraries, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Box 59, Scrapbook presented by W. P. Bayless, editor of the Pittsburgh *Courier*, to Prof. and Mrs. H. L. Freeman, 14 September 1911).

Based on circumstantial evidence, Freeman was twenty-one years old when he arrived in Denver, sometime between the printing of the 1890 and the 1891 city directories that were released each June. Freeman's father Sylvester and his step-mother had moved to Denver by 1889, though it is unclear if Colorado otherwise bore any special significance or opportunity for

violinist, adjutant in the U.S. Army, general manager of the Negro Opera Company, and the executor of his estate who tirelessly worked to perpetuate and preserve his father's legacy.

the family. Or perhaps, as Celia Davidson has suggested, Freeman was purely an "avid reader and armchair adventurer" who decided to venture west to join his family and seek his fortune.[53] Though the 1891 city directory lists no occupation for Freeman, he lodged at 1646 Pennsylvania Avenue (not with his father at 1750 California), and by his own account, was employed at the prestigious Denver Club, a men's social organization whose founders' names still mark city streets: Moffat, Cheesman, Wolcott, Routt.[54] The following year, he lodged at the home of the widow Mrs. Henry Carter at 2612 Lawrence Street; he lived there along with two porters for the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad and a German clerk. By this time, a profession was listed for Freeman in the city directory: "musician."[55] At the house on Pennsylvania, Freeman had lived with a cook, Abraham Williamson, with whom he developed a friendship. The two shared housing again in 1893 in a small wood-frame house at 2726 Welton Street, at which time Freeman's profession was listed as a "music teacher."[56] In the house on Welton Street, Freeman gave piano and vocal lessons, and composed his first two operas on his own librettos. Having Abram Williamson close at hand proved to be a boon for his creative process while writing his first operas, helping also to develop relationships with others in the community that would make their first performances possible.

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[53] Celia E. Davidson, "Freeman, Harry Lawrence," in *International Dictionary of Black Composers*, edited by Samuel A. Floyd, Jr (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), 467.

[54] Celia Davidson, "Operas by Afro-American Composers: A Critical Survey and Analysis of Selected Works" (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1980), 14; Smiley, *History of Denver*, 911.

[55] *1891 Corbett & Ballenger's 19th Annual Denver City Directory*, 551; *1892 Ballenger & Richards' 20th Annual Denver City Directory*, 415.

[56] *1893 Corbett & Ballenger's 21st Annual Denver City Directory*, 404, 1147.

Figure 27 View of houses and Jarvis Hall, an Episcopal boys school (with bell cupola), on Twentieth Street between Welton and Glenarm Streets; looking north to the Five Points neighborhood, c. 1880–1886. (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, WHJ-10458).

The story of Denver's historically black neighborhood known as Five Points began in the 1870s as westward migration accelerated and the city's population grew to the point that suburbs developed (Figure 27). Five Points was a residential and business community, with a mix of structures ranging from modest to stylish Victorian homes and industrial complexes. Located in the northeastern part of the city, Five Points has a proud but highly segregated past, and remains a culturally diverse and socially inclusive community on the edge of downtown Denver. During the 1870s and 1880s, Five Points had a strong multi-cultural presence, with German, Irish, Jewish (Temple Emanuel, founded 1874), and African American populations living side-by-side; by the early 1900s, it was almost exclusively black.[57] Nevertheless, the tree-lined neighborhood

[57] Ronald J. Stephens, La Wanna M. Larson, and the Black American West Museum, *Images of America, African Americans of Denver* (Chicago: Arcadia, 2008); Webster Matjaka, "From Sand Creek to Somalia: Indigenous Bodies in Denver's Post-Industrial Urban Cultural Re-imagination" (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2017), 125–128; Robert Fink, "Five Points Area, Denver," in *Encyclopedia of African American Society*, ed. Gerald D. Jaynes (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 336–337; Goetz and Boschmann, *Metropolitan Denver*, 95–97.

was an attractive place to live, with a horse-drawn streetcar that serviced the neighborhood by way of Welton Street into downtown, and the city's first public park, Curtis Park. This was where Freeman lived, worked, worshipped, and found his place of cultural leadership.

Freeman was first recognized in the Denver press as the director of music at Central Baptist Church.[58] Founded in September 1891, Central Baptist was formed by sixty parishioners from Zion Baptist Church who—under the leadership of W. P. T. Jones, a physician by training—received permission to break off and start a congregation farther north along Larimer Street, a location more central to Five Points.[59] A vibrant congregation, Central Baptist offered two Sunday services, a Wednesday evening service, and no fewer than forty "elder scholars" were on hand to instruct Sunday school. More than religious education, the scholars led classes in financial and business management, organized political clubs, offered social and financial support, and helped develop and pass along cultural resources.[60] The church was foundational to helping its members construct autonomous lives for themselves in a new frontier. As W. E. B. Du Bois observed, religious camaraderie produced African American churches, organizations, and mutual-aid societies, and spurred economic cooperation that built black communities through entrepreneurship.[61] Therefore, participating in this congregation afforded Freeman the

[58] *RMN*, 11 January 1892, 2.

[59] Central Baptist Church first held services at the Old Campbell A. M. E. Church at 23rd and Larimer Streets before building on their present location at 24th and California Streets. As of 2003, this land is shared with Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library. Laura M. Mauck, *Five Points Neighborhood of Denver* (Chicago: Arcadia, 2001), 7–8, 36. A detailed study of Denver's historic black churches, especially Zion, was completed by Clementine Washington Pigford, which is available as a manuscript draft at the Blair-Caldwell Library; see *They Came to Colorado with the Dust of Slavery on Their Backs* (unpublished manuscript, 1999), 9 volumes. Zion is regarded as one of the three oldest black churches west of the Mississippi River; historical records date it to 15 November 1865 when it was formed by a group of thirteen freed slaves; see Terri Lynne Smith Gentry, "A Perspective on the History of Religion in Denver's Black Community" (master's thesis, University of Colorado, 2013).

[60] On the Black Church and the cultural, social, economic, and political resources they provided to congregants, see David Carroll Cochran, *The Color of Freedom: Race and Contemporary American Liberalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 117–125.

[61] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Some Efforts of American Negroes for Their Own Social Betterment* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta University Press, 1898). For more of Du Bois's own views on the Black Church and social betterment, see *W. E. B.*

opportunity to develop his musical skills while finding a place of leadership in Denver's growing African American community. It was a pathway to building rapport with church members and other related organizations to which they belonged, and through his work, he shaped an associational network of black amateur musicians and advocates who would encourage and sustain his musical-theatrical interests.

Eighteen ninety-two was a social coming-out year for Freeman, during which he appeared at a number of functions that drew attention from the press. These included a grand masquerade given by the local lodge of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, a black fraternal society whose membership swelled in the late-nineteenth century and was known for its strict code of moral conduct.[62] Freeman was one of the young bachelors singled out in a social column, "They Were There," and the company he kept was inspiring.[63] For example, the ball was highlighted with speeches from Robert M. Johnson, the lodge's provincial grand master and by day a janitor, on the duty of good fellowship, and Edwin H. Hackley delivered an address titled "Harmony and Discord." A former student of the University of Michigan's Department of Law, Hackley was the first African American admitted to the Colorado bar in 1883, and had recently taken over as owner and editor of the *Statesman*.[64] At this time, Hackley was courting from afar

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Du Bois and the Sociology of the Black Church and Religion, 1897–1914, edited by Robert A. Wortham (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), esp. 189–200; for a an overview of Du Bois's sociological study of the Black Church in the United States, see Robert A. Wortham, "Du Bois and the Sociology of Religion: Rediscovering a Founding Figure," *Sociological Inquiry* 75, no. 4 (November 2005): 433–452.

[62] David M. Fahey, "Grand United Order of Odd Fellows," in *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations*, edited by Nina Mjagkij (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 252–253.

[63] "They Were There. Colored Odd Fellows Masquerade Ball a Big Success," *RMN*, 16 March 1892, 6. More than two hundred guests attended the invitation-only ball, the lodge's tenth annual fundraising event, which was held the evening of Monday, March 14 at East Turner Hall. "Turner Hall" is an anglicization of *Turnhalle*, and the two terms were interchangeable in official documents and press coverage of the time.

[64] J. Clay Smith, Jr., *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844–1944* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 490–491; Lisa Pertillar Brevard, *A Biography of Edwin Henry Hackley, 1859–1940: African-American Attorney and Activist* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).

a young teacher he had met backstage at a concert given by Sissieretta Jones in Detroit in 1889. In 1894, he eloped with Emma Azalia Smith, a musician, teacher, and education activist who brought her talents to Denver, where she was the first African American graduate of Denver University's School of Music. There is no evidence to suggests that Freeman and E. Azalia Hackley ever crossed paths in Denver. Even so, they almost certainly knew of each other—through Edwin, if nothing else—and their shared commitment to making music education accessible in African American communities and to using music and theater to advance and promote racial pride, implies an ideological connection.

Freeman also participated in and likely helped organize a variety show in December 1892, given by members of the Central Baptist as a benefit for one "Little Sara."[65] Sara danced and pantomimed military drills across the stage at East Turner Hall, and recited two popular poems: Margaret Vandegrift's "The Clown's Baby" and "The Newsboy" by E. T. Corbett, each of which take mutual aid and the Golden Rule as their themes.[66] In addition to her performance and that of an acrobat duo, two groups identified only as the Clifton quartette and the young ladies' quartette provided much of the musical program, and Freeman was a featured artist "in baritone solos." The evening's performance netted little Sara $125, a substantial sum equivalent to US$(2017)3,500. It is unlikely we can know more about Sara or specifically her need of a benefit, but the fact that members of her community came together to organize this event—which involved arranging for the venue, advertising, and committing time and talent to the effort—underlines the cooperative activity that was the backbone of Denver's black community. While this concert does not appear to have been directly linked with a specific mutual-aid or

[65] "Little Sara's Benefit," *RMN*, 15 December 1892, 2.

[66] The poems were printed in an elocution primer, *Two Hundred Popular Recitations and Readings*, edited by J. S. Ogilvie (New York: J. S. Ogilvie Publishing, 1892).

beneficial society, it does represent collective practice and action, and an interconnectedness of individuals and institutions who were willing to provide solidarity and support to others.[67] The German community's Turner Hall, the site of Little Sara's benefit, was also offered to Freeman as the venue for the premiere of his first opera in February 1893.

Freeman was among those patrons seated in the balcony of the new Broadway Theater on Monday, March 9, 1891, to hear Emma Juch sing Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*, a performance that as we have seen, was largely responsible for introducing Wagnerism to Denver. In his letter to Hipsher, Freeman recalled this evening with great fondness, and considered it to be the impetus behind his desire to compose:

> When I retired that night, I could not sleep as the music was a revelation to me and I was stirred by strange emotions. At five o'clock in the morning I arose, and seating myself at the piano, composed my first piece—a waltz song of the dimensions of [Luigi] Arditi's "Ecstasy." Every day thereafter for two hundred days I composed a new song. None of them, however, had words. It was some months later that I discovered I could write verses as well as music. These songs were all composed before I had ever had one lesson in theory or composition. In fact, my first two operas, *The Martyr* and *Valdo* were composed before I had studied composition or theory.[68]

His recollections here are similar to but not exactly the same as those described in an 1898 syndicated article, which he originally penned for the *Washington Post*. In the earlier version of this story, Freeman admitted his hesitation to attend the opera, "never having attended an opera, and having been reared with the idea that they were everything that was low and degrading." He concluded: "I soon discovered my error."[69]

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[67] On early African American cooperative economic activity and collective action, see Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 31–47.

[68] "Typed manuscript response to Mr. Edward Ellsworth Hipsher," H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, 1870–1982, Box 49, Folder 3, Series IV, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library; Hipsher, *American Opera and Its Composers*, 190.

[69] "African Grand Opera; Harry L. Freeman Determined to Develop It," *Washington Post,* 15 May 1898, 25.

To Hipsher, Freeman claimed *The Martyr* as his first opera, but in the *Post* column confessed that, after writing about a hundred ballads and sacred solos, his first opera was actually a "romantic work in three acts" titled *Ephthelia*, which he began on December 10, 1892, and completed "in pencil sketch" on January 9, 1893. Freeman brought together a cast of sixty people to perform *Ephthelia* on Thursday, February 9 at Denver's Turner Hall. He later described the premiere as "very well received," and for that matter, the review of Freeman's first opera in the *News* may have been brief, but it is nevertheless there, printed in the white press in a column titled, "A Colored Librettist." With enthusiasm for the work and its interpreters, the review read:

> *Ephthelia*, the opera in three acts by Harry L. Freeman at Turner Hall Thursday evening, was a grand success. It is a fine work and Madame Williamson, the star, has a brilliant future. This is the first opera ever written by a colored man and Mr. Freeman certainly deserves much praise for his ability as a musician and composer.[70]

As no score nor additional descriptions of *Ephthelia* appear to exist, we are left to speculate if it may have been an early sketch of a piece titled *Athalia*, which Freeman completed in 1916 after arriving in New York City.[71] "Madame Williamson" was almost certainly Ida Williamson, who was likely married to or otherwise related to Freeman's companion Abram Williamson. Both Ida and Abram took starring roles in Freeman's next opera, *The Martyr*. On balance, Freeman's operatic activity in Denver can be surveyed between December 1892 and the fall of 1893 within the context of his community and the cultural and social events happening at Turner Hall.

[70] "A Colored Librettist," *RMN*, 12 February 1893, 5.

[71] Celia Davidson suggested that the score to *Ephthelia* was "lost in storage along with furniture" during Freeman's return move to Ohio. Though she does not say explicitly, this information may have come from an interview conducted with Valdo Freeman; Davidson, "Operas by Afro-American Composers," 15n.12.

By the early 1890s, Denver's German and African American populations lived in the adjoining tree-lined Curtis Park and Five Points neighborhoods, and would have interacted in any number of ways: African Americans did business with German shopkeepers and toasted the end of a work day with beer brewed by Jacob Schueler and Adolph Coors; Germans patronized black chefs, barbers, and wagoners, and rented their homes and storefronts from laundress-turned-real estate investor Clara Brown—the proceeds of which, in turn, went to support Denver's black churches and scholarships for former slave children at Oberlin College.[72] As both groups' sacred and secular associations and the populations they served continued to grow, social interactions between the two became more regular, dynamic, and pluralistic.

Turner Hall was the primary space of intersection, owned and operated by the local Turnverein, which defined itself by its liberal principles. Since the early-1850s, the National Turnerbund had been a base for antislavery activism, amending their governing documents in 1855 to expressly condemn slavery.[73] German immigrants' concepts of class and ideology created diverse racial views within their cities, and shaped their interactions with African American across the country. Both German immigrants and African Americans were viewed as minorities, foreign Others that stirred anxiety and nativist fears, and a threat to the labor interests of native-born whites. Having endured the failed revolutions of the mid-nineteenth century, many Forty-Eighter immigrants brought with them tenets they translated into conscious political acts, including the formation of social organizations such as the Turnverein movement, which

[72] Ronald J. Stephens, "Colorado," in *Black America: A State-by-State Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Alton Hornsby, Jr. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO), 99–102.

[73] Robert Knight Barney, "German-American Turnvereins and Socio-Politico-Economic Realities in the Antebellum and Civil War Upper and Lower South," *Stadion* 10 (1984): 135–181.

advocated for universal human rights, social equality, and national unity.[74] It was a moral imperative that Turnvereine avoid schisms and anything that would discredit their liberal movement, such as incidents of racial discrimination or suppression, and collaboration with the African American community would have been viewed as a matter of political and financial expediency.[75]

Reading Harry Lawrence Freeman's *The Martyr* (1893) in Denver

There exists a non-dominant opera culture—a "shadow culture" of opera, to draw upon Naomi André's perspective and methodology of study—from which black participation and black subjects in opera, especially forgotten performers and repertories of the past, are really only just being brought to light. As opera culture in the United States remained all-white and segregated until the middle of the twentieth century, the presence of a shadow culture of opera reveals "a different narrative of opera that has a parallel, yet obscured, lineage to the dominant opera tradition."[76] Studying shadow opera culture engages black participation, stories, and subjects in works that are newer or have been hidden, and examines how black experiences are represented in opera not to exoticize, but to empower. With its creative roots in a quasi-hagiographic Exodus story coupled with Wagnerism, and its production by Denver's black community and the influence of socio-religious institutions, this reading of Freeman's first opera

[74] Mischa Honeck, "An Unexpected Alliance," in *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange,* eds. Larry A. Greene and Anke Ortlepp (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 42–43.

[75] On German American racial attitudes during the nineteenth-century and the relationship between German immigrants and African Americans, see Horst Ueberhorst, *Turner Unterm Sternenbanner: Der Kampf der deutsch-amerikanischen Turner fur Einheit, Freiheit, und soziale Gerechtigkeit, 1848 bis 1918* (München: Heinz Moos Verlag, 1978); Annette R. Hofmann, "One Hundred Fifty Years of Loyalty: The Turner Movement in the United States," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 34 (1999): 63–81; Kristen Layne Anderson, "German Americans, African Americans, and the Construction of Racial Identity in Nineteenth-Century St. Louis, 1848–1872" (PhD diss., The University of Iowa, 2009).

[76] Naomi André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 9–13.

The Martyr addresses only a small part of the larger story to be told. In this piece, we begin to see Freeman's careful navigation between his taste for European grand opera and the adaptability required of a young African American composer making promising (if not forgotten) strides at integrating the genre.

Following the February 1893 premiere of *Ephthelia*, Freeman set to work on *The Martyr*, a "sacred opera in one act" that he variously titled *Platonus* (after the main character).[77] According to Freeman, work was completed by August 2, and it was first performed shortly thereafter on August 16, 1893, at Denver's Turner Hall.[78] Regrettably, unlike *Ephthelia*, the white press neither advertised nor reviewed *The Martyr*, and volumes of Denver's weekly black newspaper the *Statesman* from the early 1890s are missing; furthermore, Freeman's personal scrapbooks contain no clippings from the 1893 performances. Therefore, we are left to rely on Freeman's reports to Hipsher and the *Washington Post*, and on information incidental to his collaborators and the Five Points musical and religious community.

The Martyr resurfaces throughout Freeman's career. He reported a performance at Bethel A. M. E. Church in Chicago later in 1893—near the Columbian Exposition, but not directly affiliated as has been suggested elsewhere—and again in 1905; however, it has not been possible to confirm either of these performances. During his time as the head of music at Wilberforce University in 1902, *The Martyr* was performed with his wife, soprano Carlotta Freeman, in the

[77] I am appreciative to Lucy Caplan (Yale University, PhD candidate in American and African American Studies) for our illuminating discussions about Harry Lawrence Freeman and *The Martyr* in particular. Though we have arrived at diverging readings of the work, which she will similarly present as part of her doctoral dissertation, our shared enthusiasm for this piece and its composer has been an inspiration. I am similarly grateful to David Gutkin (Columbia University, PhD, Historical Musicology, 2015) for his insight on Freeman's later works and their intersections with concepts of "modernity," jazz, and the Harlem Renaissance, particularly Freeman's never-performed "jazz opera" *American Romance* (1924–1929); see David Gutkin, "American Opera, Jazz, and Historical Consciousness, 1924–1994" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015).

[78] "African Grand Opera; Harry L. Freeman Determined to Develop It," *Washington Post,* 15 May 1898, 25.

role of Shirah (Figure 28), which she sang again in 1915 at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem.[79] Finally, on September 21, 1947, at Carnegie Hall, a semi-staged version was performed in a self-produced concert dedicated to Freeman's compositions; the magnificent Muriel Rahn, who later created Carmen in *Carmen Jones* on Broadway, led the performance.[80]

Set in Egypt during the twelfth-century BCE at the time of a solar eclipse, *The Martyr* is best described as a socio-religious and racial origin narrative. It centers around Platonus, an Egyptian of noble birth who is martyred for rejecting the polytheistic beliefs of his people. He has been condemned to death for his professed faith in Jehovah, a judgment that prompts the cries of a chorus of wailers and slaves to Isis on his behalf. He is prodded by Pharaoh to prove the existence of his singular God with a miracle; instead, he smashes idols of Egyptian gods on the altar. This act of zealotry hastens his execution; he will be sacrificed to Isis, who will then allow the sun to return. Shirah, Platonus's betrothed, tries to intercede on his behalf. The Pharaoh takes the opportunity to force himself on Shirah in exchange for saving Platonus's life. She begins to acquiesce, but the Queen sees their intimate moment, interrupts, and demands the immediate execution of Platonus. Shirah, in response, drowns herself in the Nile. Platonus goes to the stake without remorse, saying that he sees a vision of heaven before him cutting through the sky, even though to everyone else it remains dark.

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[79] Carlotta Freeman (c.1877–11 June 1954) was a stage actress and one of the first African American women in the legitimate theatre as an original member of the Anita Bush Stock Company and the Lafayette Players. Errol Hill and James V. Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 202–205.

[80] Known performances of *The Martyr* are identified in Davidson, "Operas by Afro-American Composers," 33–34. On the Carnegie Hall performance, see "Opera By Negro Company," *New York Times*, 22 September 1947, 29; of Rahn's performance as Shirah, the Baltimore *Afro-American* stated: "[Rahn] gave ample evidence that she is the logical candidate for the Metropolitan's next production of *Aida* when, and if, that august body ever decides to 'lower the bars' and admit native-born American artists of color to its ranks;" see "*Martyr*, Uncovers Star for Role in Met's *Aida*," *Afro-American*, 11 October 1947, 6.

Figure 28 "Carlotta Freeman as Shira in the opera *The Martyr*, produced at Wilberforce University, October 1902." (Columbia University Libraries, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Box 59, Scrapbook presented by W. P. Bayless, editor of the Pittsburgh *Courier*, to Prof. and Mrs. H. L. Freeman, 14 September 1911).[81]

Throughout *The Martyr*, Freeman uses leitmotivs and dense textures to show his allegiance to a European operatic tradition. Freeman was resolute in distancing himself from the vernacular musical traditions of the black South, at least in the works he wrote before moving to New York City. Later in life, he recounted a conversation on the matter with Paul Laurence Dunbar, who confronted the composer on his decision to ignore "Negro themes . . . the folk, work or camp-meeting songs of the South," Dunbar wrote, "There is nothing Negroid in any of your compositions." To which Freeman replied:

[81] The inscription at the bottom of the watercolor reads "Painting by Lee, daughter of Bishop Lee," which refers to Benjamin F. Lee, president of Wilberforce University from 1876 to 1884 and bishop in the A. M. E. church from 1892 to 1921; he had three daughters, Sarah and Addie also taught at Wilberforce, his eldest was Effie Lee Newsome, the prominent Harlem Renaissance children's poet.

> I didn't intend that there should be. What do I know about those things? (I was insulted—outraged—exasperated.) Let somebody else do it; it is all totally foreign to me. . . . Do all the 'South Before the War' stuff you wish. None of it for me.[82]

Although the music of *The Martyr* is rooted in Freeman's conscientious dissemblance from the musical heritage of black America, the story he chose responds to and is deeply fixed in African American experience.

His preference for the traditions of grand opera also featured into the design and physical presentation of the work. Freeman introduced the setting for *The Martyr* at the opening of two manuscript scores, including what appears to be an early draft version (Mss. 1456, Box 17) and a fair copy (Mss. 1456, Box 18).[83]

> Royal courtyard of Thebes, adorned by lofty pillars, resplendent with multi-colored hieroglyphics. To the left a spacious dais, upon which is mounted the double throne of the Pharaohs, while to the right a sacrificial altar appears, surmounted by an image of the Egyptian deity, Osiris. In the perspective the sacred waters of the Nile may be described, upon whose bosom several feluccas ride at anchor.

This setting was of great importance to Freeman, and remained with him throughout his career. When he incorporated the Negro Grand Opera Company in New York City in 1920, he commissioned the little-known artist Edward Elcha—a respected scenic designer, painter, and photographer of the Harlem Renaissance—to paint the scene for use as the company's masthead on stationery, business cards, programs, and company stock certificates (Figure 29).[84] The scene

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[82] H. Lawrence Freeman, *The Negro in Music and Drama* (unpublished typescript). In H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, 1870–1982, Series V, Box 50, Folder 3, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

[83] "*The Martyr*, Piano-vocal score, undated (pencil), Box 17" and "*The Martyr*, Piano-vocal score, 1893 (ink), Box 18," in H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, 1870–1982, Series VIII, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

[84] Lara Antal, *James Van Der Zee: Photographer* (New York: Cavendish Square, 2017), 67–68. Elcha painted most of the scenic backdrops used by Van Der Zee in his studio portraits, including those seen in well-known images including "Lady with Wide-Brimmed Straw Hat" (1934), "Evening Attire" (1922), and members of Member of Marcus Garvey's Universal African Legion during the early 1920s. Elcha also painted a portrait of the Freeman family, which is held at Columbia University, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Mss. 1456, Box 48.

shows Shirah petitioning for Platonus's life in the royal palace, which is adorned with an altar of burnt offering at the left and the pharaoh's dais at the right with the Nile and the Great Sphinx of Giza visible in the background. (Compare how thoroughly the painting matches Freeman's setting of the scene as described above.) There is no reason to suspect that the production in Denver came close to realizing what Freeman had envisioned. For that matter, given that the opera was completed only two weeks earlier and that there remains no trace of its performance there other than Freeman's own testaments, its first performance was probably little more than a semi-staged reading with Freeman at the piano.

Even so, by setting his first opera in ancient Egypt and expressing his intentions for the fantastical concept, which one day he would be able to realize, Freeman was liberating his opera from the typical black performance stereotypes of the time. Certainly, he could draw upon popular nineteenth-century orientalist images of the African continent embodied in works such as Verdi's *Aïda* to legitimize the work.[85] But the story Freeman desired to tell with *The Martyr* was not of exile and condemnation, but of independence, with deep resonance in the African American experience and the admixture of hope and misfortune found in Exodus. To several of Freeman's performers and listeners, freedom had been experienced first-hand; emancipation and their migration westward meant education, employment, the establishment of independent communities, and the expression of place and identity through art. Defined by its localism and the amateurism of its performers, *The Martyr* provisioned a means for Freeman's friends and associates from clubs, church, and choirs, to express their place in the American West through a

[85] Lucy Caplan, in her forthcoming dissertation, considers *The Martyr* to be an emancipated re-reading of Verdi's *Aïda*. I believe our two interpretations to be complementary, and will help us to better understand the multivalent black experience of opera production during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

work of vernacular creativity, albeit cast in the mold of a European grand opera, that was evocative of the liberation either they or their parents experienced.

Figure 29 Scene from Harry Lawrence Freeman's *The Martyr*, by Edward Elcha, c. 1920, used as masthead image for the Negro Grand Opera Company, New York City. (Columbia University Libraries, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Box 42.)

Prevailing Old Testament themes throughout *The Martyr* intimate its interpretation as an allegory of Exodus. On the first page of the ink piano-vocal score, Freeman notes that the story is set during the reign of King Merneptah, who in 1893 was widely believed to be the pharaoh of Exodus.[86] Furthermore, there are two parallel beliefs of the historic Black Church that frame this

[86] Merneptah was pharaoh at the time of an Emergent Israel. Mark Leuchter has noted that "the appearance of 12th century BCE Israelite settlements in the highlands should be seen as a reaction to campaigns like that of Merneptah . . . it was the breaking of Egypto-Canaanite forces and culture that created the basis for their own (Emergent Israel) socioreligious sensibilities;" see Mark Leuchter, *The Levites and the Boundaries of Israelite Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 42. Relative to the nineteenth-century Egyptology and perhaps Freeman's familiarity with the reign of Merneptah, see *The American Cyclopaedia: A Popular Dictionary for General Knowledge*, ed. George Ripley, Charles Anderson Dana (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1879–1883,

reading. First, the image of the God of the Old Testament as an avenging, liberating force was a central tenet. As observed by Black Church historians Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, "the direct relationship between the holocaust of slavery and the notion of divine rescue colored the theological perceptions of black laity."[87] Platonus's unwavering commitment to his monotheism builds upon a religious commitment and belief held by generations of African Americans that divine intervention alone would lead the way out of chattel slavery.

Second are the work's allusions to the death of bondage and freedom. Set on the eve of Exodus, the presence of a slave chorus in *The Martyr* echoes parallelisms between the bondage of Israel and American slavery. Many founding members of the Black Church were slaves when they collectively encountered Judeo-Christian theology, and so it was as slaves that they learned of the promise of "the way out" (the literal translation of the Greek *exodus*) given by God to the ancient Israelites in Egypt. The spirituals and stories told about deliverance at the Red Sea (e.g., "Go Down, Moses" and "Didn't old Pharaoh get lost") remain, as Allen Callahan has argued, "our oldest testimony to the Exodus in African-American folk tradition."[88] These testimonies of faith were freely and regularly renewed in other forms of black cultural expression; for example, spirituals that celebrated freedom came to be known as jubilee songs—taking their name from the year of jubilee when, as prescribed in Leviticus 25, all land returned to ancestral ownership and all Israelites were freed. These songs were introduced as art music to European audiences by

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reprint in 1888), VI:462: "Merneptah, who established his capital at Memphis, and at the very beginning of his reign had a contest with the northern settlers of the Delta, who sought to extend their dominion over all Egypt, but were finally defeated. A short time after this struggle is supposed to have occurred the exodus of the Israelites, which was a great blow to Egypt by depriving it of millions of industrious people, not to speak of the calamities described in the Scripture narrative."

[87] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 2–7.

[88] Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 83–85.

groups such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers.[89] Similarly, Freeman's *The Martyr* entered into a lineage of spiritual and cultural expressions collected around the promise of the biblical story of exodus.

Definite resemblances between Platonus and Moses are present. Both personages adhered to an uncompromising commitment to a singular God; they are each archetypical of faithful community leaders who were raised as part of the nobility, but have rejected their status in the interest of being spiritual and physical deliverers; and both smash idols in the presence of their captors as an act of disobedience. In some ways, it seems that Freeman almost designed the character of Platonus to be seen a young Moses, cut off just before his flight to Midian or the ten plagues. Then there is the question of peoplehood. For some African Americans following emancipation, the American West was seen as a new Canaan, and therefore the mass westward migrations beginning in the late 1870s were viewed as a re-enactment of Exodus. The great hope in western migration, however, was ultimately misplaced. Sojourner Truth revealed as much when she lobbied the United States government to set aside lands for African American settlement: "I have prayed so long that my people would go to Kansas, and that God would make straight a way before them."[90] Perhaps this aligns with Freeman's own reasons for moving to the American West as a young man.

For African Americans living in Five Points in 1893, *The Martyr* was an opportunity to witness a quasi-Exodus story in a manner that related to their experience of emancipation,

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[89] Ibid. On the Fisk Jubilee Singers, the African American entrance into discussion of "Western" art music and cultural values, and the dissemination of African American spirituals in Europe, see Kira Thurman, "Singing the Civilizing Mission in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms: The Fisk Jubilee Singers in Nineteenth-Century Germany," *Journal of World History* 27, no. 3 (September 2016): 443–471; and Kira Thurman, "A History of Black Musicians in Germany and Austria, 1870–1961: Race, Performance, and Reception" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2013).

[90] Arthur Fauset, *Sojourner Truth: God's Faithful Pilgrim* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1971), 175; see also, Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., "Myth and African American Self-Identity," in *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*, ed. Craig R. Prentiss (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 28–42.

western migration, and settlement. Freeman was an important member of the Five Points community, a leader in the religious and cultural life of the community, and had used opera to coalesce those two fundamental aspects of his community's identity. We can probably never know how many attended the performance at Turner Hall, how it was received, and the impact that it may have had on the community. Freeman did identify in his letter to Hipsher the cast as it was assembled for that first performance (see Table 5). It included amateur musicians who worked vocationally in jobs open to black Denverites at the time, and several who had a personal friendship with Freeman or were also members of Central Baptist Church. As with all other diasporic communities, social creativity became a part of the cultural life and identity of the Five Points community.

Table 5 Cast of Freeman's *The Martyr* 1893 production at Denver's Turner Hall.

Character	**Performer**	**Performer's Occupation**[91]
Pharaoh (Tenor)	Abram Williamson	Cook, The Princeton Club
Mariamum (Mezzo-Soprano)	Adah Roberts	School teacher
Platonus, The Martyr (Baritone)	William Car(e)y	Head waiter, Brown Palace Hotel
Rei, the High Priest (Basso)	Edward Bennett	Clerk, J. J. Cronon's Pharmacy
Shirah (Soprano)	Ida Williamson	(Not documented)

More than any other of Freeman's operas, *The Martyr* was a perpetual work in progress. Of the several sources available in the H. Lawrence Freeman Papers at Columbia University, an undated piano-vocal score in pencil (Ms. 1456, Box 17) is the musical source likely connected to its 1893 Denver premiere. Most of this score, which was the version of the work consulted in this analysis, is written on standard twelve-stave manuscript paper, though a number of different manuscript paper types are found intermittently throughout, including those ruled for piano solo, melodic instrument with piano accompaniment, and seven-piece brass band. The overture, first

[91] Compiled from Corbett & Ballenger's, *1893 21st Annual Denver City Directory* (Denver: Tribune Association).

act, and the first two scenes of the second act appear to be in near-final form, showing few editorial changes and suggesting that another compositional score preceded this one. The rest of Act II, however, shows signs of drafting, including erasures and substantive reworkings, along with additions that regularly spill into the margins. The pencil is heavier toward the end of the score, perhaps revealing the composer's frantic completion of the work in time for its premiere. Another source, the pen piano-vocal score in Box 18—which may have been prepared for the 1902 performances at Wilberforce University, and matches the calligraphy and paper used in creating solo partbooks for the characters Platonus, Shirah, and Pharaoh—is largely the same in its contents as the pencil score, but alterations, especially to harmonies and regular rhythmic enlivening of the accompaniment, do suggest that this score is the work of a more seasoned composer. There also exists a full score in pen (Box 19) along with three folders of undated orchestral parts (Box 20), but as there is no evidence to suggest that Freeman had an orchestra available to him in Denver, these sources have not been consulted for the present project.

Platonus's aria, 'Oh, God to thee I cry," from Act I, Scene 1 (included as Figure 30 at the end of this chapter), illustrates Freeman's compositional skill at the age of twenty-four, as well as his innate ability to craft an introductory scene for the title character that is dramatically and musically captivating. In his interview with Celia Davidson, Freeman's son Valdo stated that "Platonus's lament," as he called this scene, "was one of his father's favorite arias and it was always a favorite with the audiences."[92] It is expansive, lasting just over seven minutes, and includes extended sections of arioso, aria, and a show-stopping ensemble. Cast in four contrasting sections, each of which has its own tonal center and melodic theme, the scene shows Platonus's evolution, beginning with intercessions and ending with a courageous acceptance of

[92] Davidson, "Operas by Afro-American Composers," 42.

his fate. His music fits comfortably in a moderately trained baritone's range, with a compass from C below middle C to F above middle C, and a tessitura that rests around middle C.

The scene begins with an arioso, during which Platonus is hidden from view and his voice is heard at a distance. Rising arpeggiations of A minor and G# diminished triads, and a dominant seventh on A, are interrupted by the martyr's first vocal statement in D minor, marked by its religiosity and sustained, slowly morphing harmonies. The accented dissonance on "grant," accompanied by a half-diminished seventh on G over a pedal, comes unprepared, emphasizing—as does the constant wavering between tonal centers—the character's desolate, adrift state. Perhaps the most delightful surprise in this arioso, however, is the familiar structure that appears on the third beat of m. 23: a verbatim voicing of the Tristan chord, the augmented sixth chord (or enharmonically, half-diminished seventh chord on F) found in the second measure of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Though Freeman's anticipation of the G# in the previous beat weakens the impact of the sonority, it is still unmistakable. Its preparation with a chromatic bass line and unexpected resolution to the subdominant in third inversion are both far from textbook functional uses of the chord. Nevertheless, its appearance indicates Freeman's attempt to utilize tonal chromaticism in the interest of drama, an aesthetic desire to be expected of a young composer wishing to model his work after Wagner's musical and dramatic practices.

The aria proper begins in m. 34 with an enchained Platonus emerging behind a heavy iron grate above the stage. A slow lament in G minor, "Oh, God to thee I cry" is infused with the exhausted zealotry of the protagonist. Contemplating the martyrdom before him, Platonus's language quotes directly from Psalms 103 ("As for man, his days are as grass") and Isaiah 40 ("The grass withereth, the flower fadeth"), as well as Psalm 107 ("He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still") to invoke a divine presence. His phrases are short and

declamatory in the middle of his range, accompanied by a hypnotic, evenly paced ostinato figure above a drone. Drawing on a musical trope used by opera composers since the baroque period, the inflexible accompaniment of this aria is indicative of the character's imprisonment. His torment is exacerbated in the second section of the aria (beginning m. 57) when sforzando fully-diminished seventh chords on E-natural and ascending chromatic passages in the bass depict the tempest and wings of death circling about him. This motive continues to modulate upwards (through fully-diminished seventh chords with F-natural and F#) before concluding on a dominant pedal on F with chromatic decoration (m. 73–76) that prepares the arrival in B-flat major of the aria's third section.

This bracing tonal movement leads to a great fanfare, described by Valdo Freeman and Davidson as "the percussive Platonus theme," which was first heard in the opera's overture and was recently alluded to in an elongated form at m. 60–62 in the melody.[93] The gesture, especially given the left-hand stride accompaniment, is also reminiscent of fiery patriotic and religious songs of the late nineteenth century. Platonus now references Psalm 23, having moved from a state of dejection at the beginning of the scene to being fearless of the judgement that awaits him. He sees visions of the Holy City and Jehovah, referencing Revelation 21, which are marshalled imaginatively onto the scene with musical pomp. The fourth and final section of the aria arrives with a graceful andante in F major that, as simple as it may seem, has an absolute calming effect. The poised martyr now sings long, lyrical lines that steadily mount the top of the singer's range, expressing comfort in his promised salvation. He has the opportunity to double down on this belief when, with inflections on a lowered supertonic and submediant, the chorus of wailers interjects on his behalf to Isis, the god Platonus is shunning in favor of belief in the Judeo-

[93] Davidson, "Operas by Afro-American Composers," 43.

Christian Jehovah. His serenity and valor, along with the F major sonority he has carried, win out in the end, and bring the scene to a resounding conclusion.

This scene, while showing a glint of Freeman's aptitude for motivic development and composing advanced harmonic progressions, is ultimately a collage of musical ideas that recur throughout the opera and help to define its title character. As Davidson noted, *The Martyr* "shows a brashness reserved for the young and the very naïve," but moreover, I would add, the strengths and eagerness of an as yet self-taught composer.[94]

The Martyr was more than a grand display of the exotic. Its performers and listeners almost certainly found resonance in its content and how it was produced. Just as white European opera from Monteverdi to Handel to Verdi had focused so regularly on mythologies and heroes, the same solemnization of a heroic figure is underway here. Opera, Freeman urged, could celebrate black stories with the same grandiosity that it immortalized Orpheus, Caesar, or Tannhäuser. While striving to write in the European operatic tradition at the exclusion of black vernacular traditions in music, *The Martyr* is nevertheless an origins narrative, one that casts the African pursuit in Egypt-Israel upon the landscape of the new African America. Harry Lawrence Freeman would not always shy away from interweaving European opera with black American music, and it was with utmost clarity and consciousness that *The Martyr* cast the mold for his school of "Negro Grand Opera."

In 1915, Freeman penned an article for the *AME Church Review* titled "The Negro in the Higher Altitudes of Music in this Country and Through the World," which reflected upon the status, accomplishments, and difficulties met by black classical musicians:

> The Negro occupies an unique position in the realms of musical art. I employ the term "unique" rather than "important" inasmuch as he has not as yet revealed to

[94] Davidson, "Operas by Afro-American Composers," 51.

> the world at large his true musical value. While the divine gifts of native talent, inherent taste and a certain adaptability in musical parlance have finally been conceded unto the Negro, his capacity for artistic achievement and logical development is still a matter of doubt and uncertainty.[95]

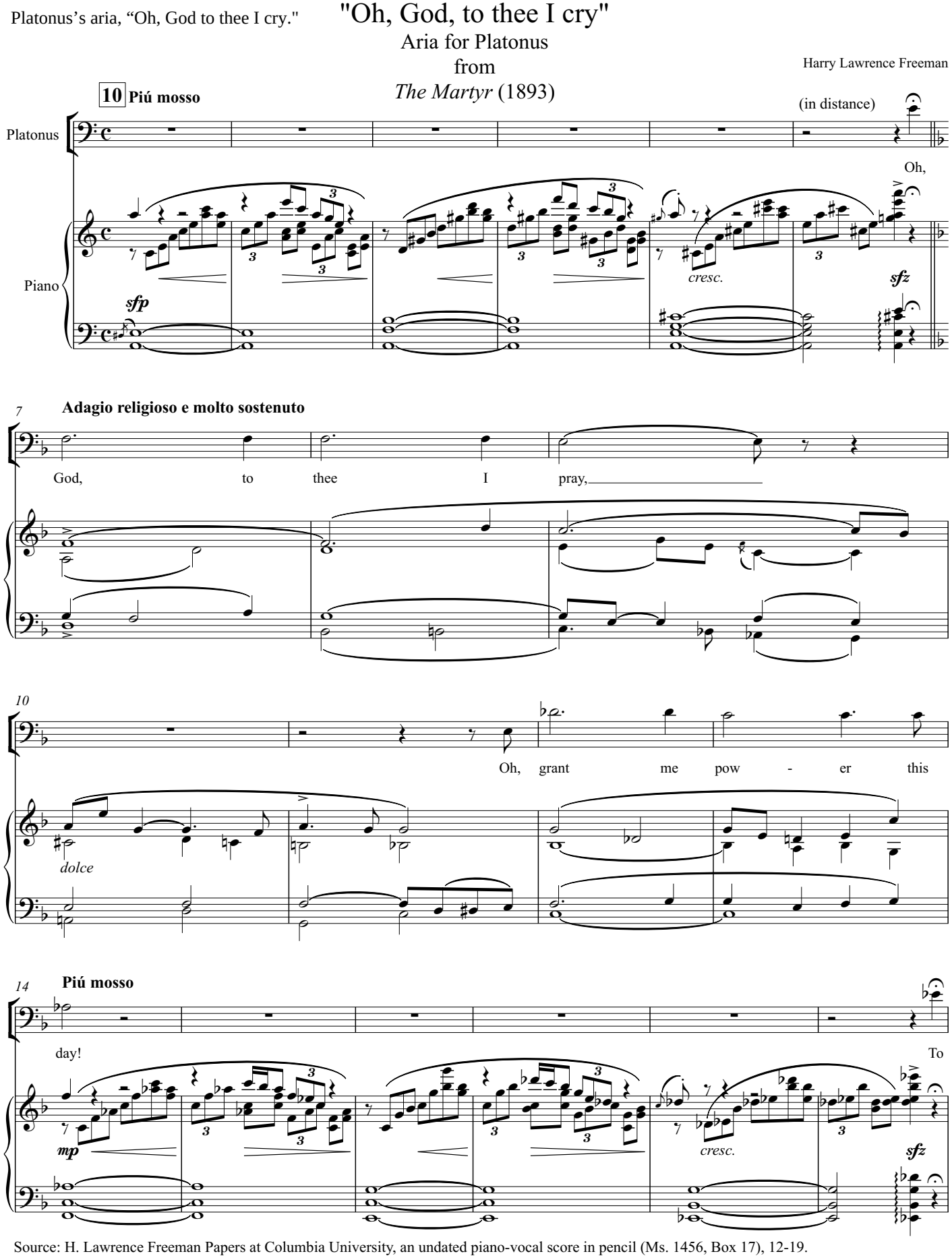
Writing for a periodical whose mission was to give to the world the best thoughts of the race, Freeman recognized that African American composers had succeeded in writing smaller musical forms but had not been afforded the opportunity to compose grand works—symphonic or operatic—especially ones that did not rely upon musical idioms that were reminiscent of (if not directly drawn from) spirituals. Freeman worked resolutely to correct this. He was the first African American composer to attain recognition as a composer of opera, and in a career spanning more than five decades and yielding twenty-one operas, including a racial-origin tetralogy entitled *Zululand* that returns to entwining Wagnerism and African American origin stories. He worked tirelessly—and to his great regret unsuccessfully—at eradicating segregation in the creation and performance of grand opera.

The contributions of the Hyers Sisters and Harry Lawrence Freeman to operatic culture and its presence in Denver show that its creation and enjoyment was not solely the purview of white musicians and audiences. Working in increasingly divided post-Reconstruction America, they used the dignified or spiritually elevating influence of art, music, and literature to tell stories and experiences that were theirs, in a form that was viewed by the dominant culture around them as ennobling. Yet if the presence of an operatic culture in nineteenth-century Denver and the American West continues to be indicative of the "progress of civilization" and the development of the urban frontier, then it is well worth acknowledging diversity and nuance in that story.

[95] The article is found pasted into the composer's personal scrapbook, see the H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, 1870–1982, Series VIII, Box 59, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

Taken together, the preceding examinations in chapters four and five have laid a foundation for a more capacious examination of amateur musicians whose practice of crafting opera maintained and developed the value of music drama to their community. As shown, each of these organizations was productive, dynamic, and often plagued by problems of jealousy and infighting. Together, they wove an important thread through Denver's social and cultural fabric. This fabric was created—with bureaucratic and financial support—both in the interest of unifying and stabilizing civic engagement, and to present the city as modern and sophisticated—that is, having citizens who were successful enough in their labor to afford the luxury of time for avocational interests. In performing operas, whether of British, European, or Coloradan origin, these amateurs advanced the legitimacy of their musical community, collaborating under self-incorporated organizations to engage in a serious enterprise. Similar stories in any number of cities of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries are likely ripe for examination.

Figure 30. Engraved score of Platonus's aria, "Oh, God to thee I cry."



Source: H. Lawrence Freeman Papers at Columbia University, an undated piano-vocal score in pencil (Ms. 1456, Box 17), 12-19.

20 **Meno**

thee, to_____ thee I_____ pray,

mf

23

Oh, grant me pow - er this

dolce

cresc.

27 **11** **Piú mosso molto agitato**

day!_____

(They rise and forth with turning gaze with great intensity at an iron grating fashioned high above the pillars on the extreme left, where Platonus suddenly appears in chains.)

WAILERS

Hark! 'Tis our brother Pla ton - us! Oh, why should he suf - fer thus?

f

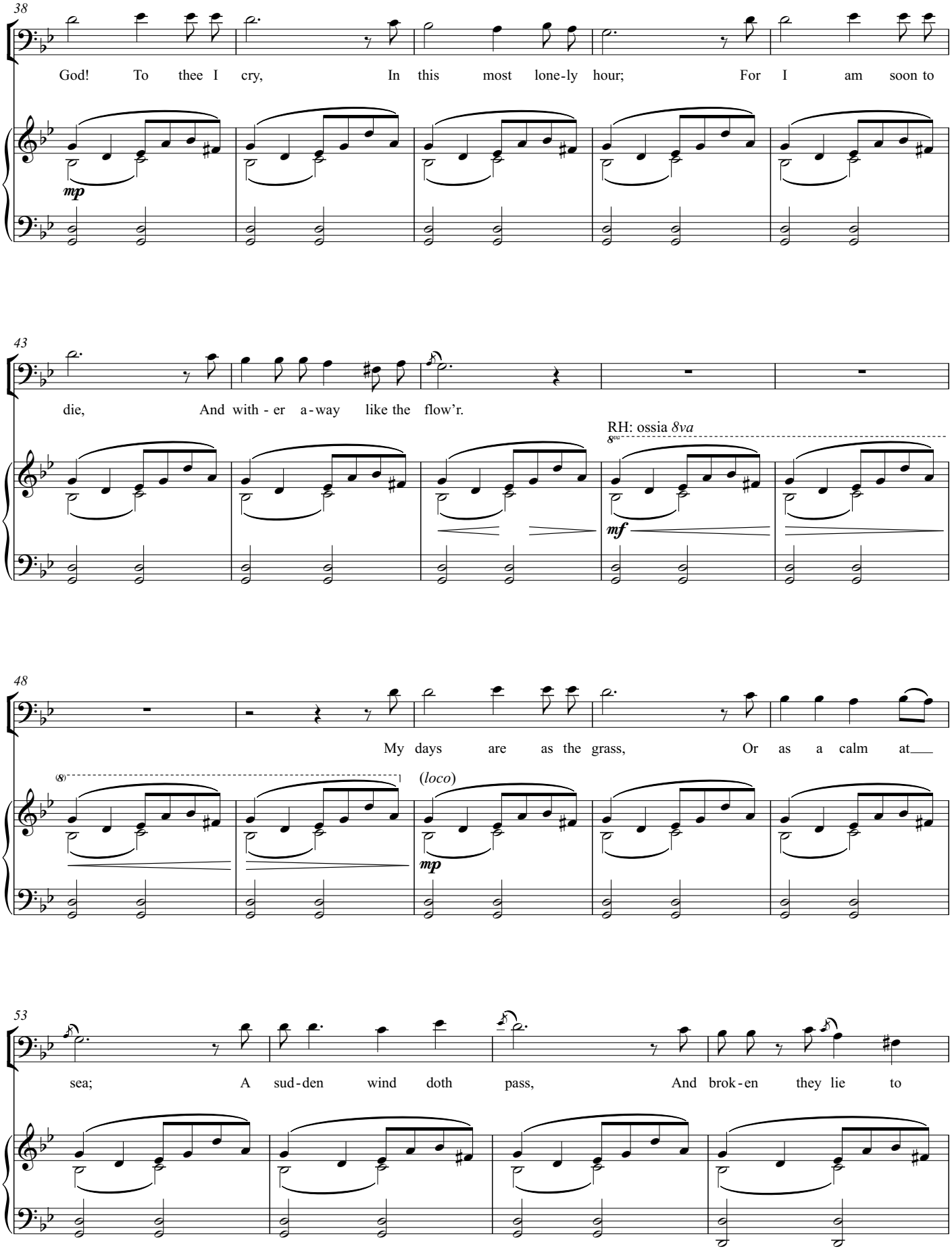
molto cresc.

34 **12** **Andante lamentoso**

PLATONUS

Oh,

mf


38
God! To thee I cry, In this most lone-ly hour; For I am soon to
mp
43
die, And with - er a-way like the flow'r.
RH: ossia 8va
8va
mf
48
My days are as the grass, Or as a calm at
(8)
(loco)
mp
53
sea; A sud-den wind doth pass, And brok-en they lie to

57 **13 Piú mosso** **Agitato**

lea. Like a

sfz *sfz*

61

might - y tem - pest that on - ward rush - es, And all with - in its fierce pow'r crush - es; I

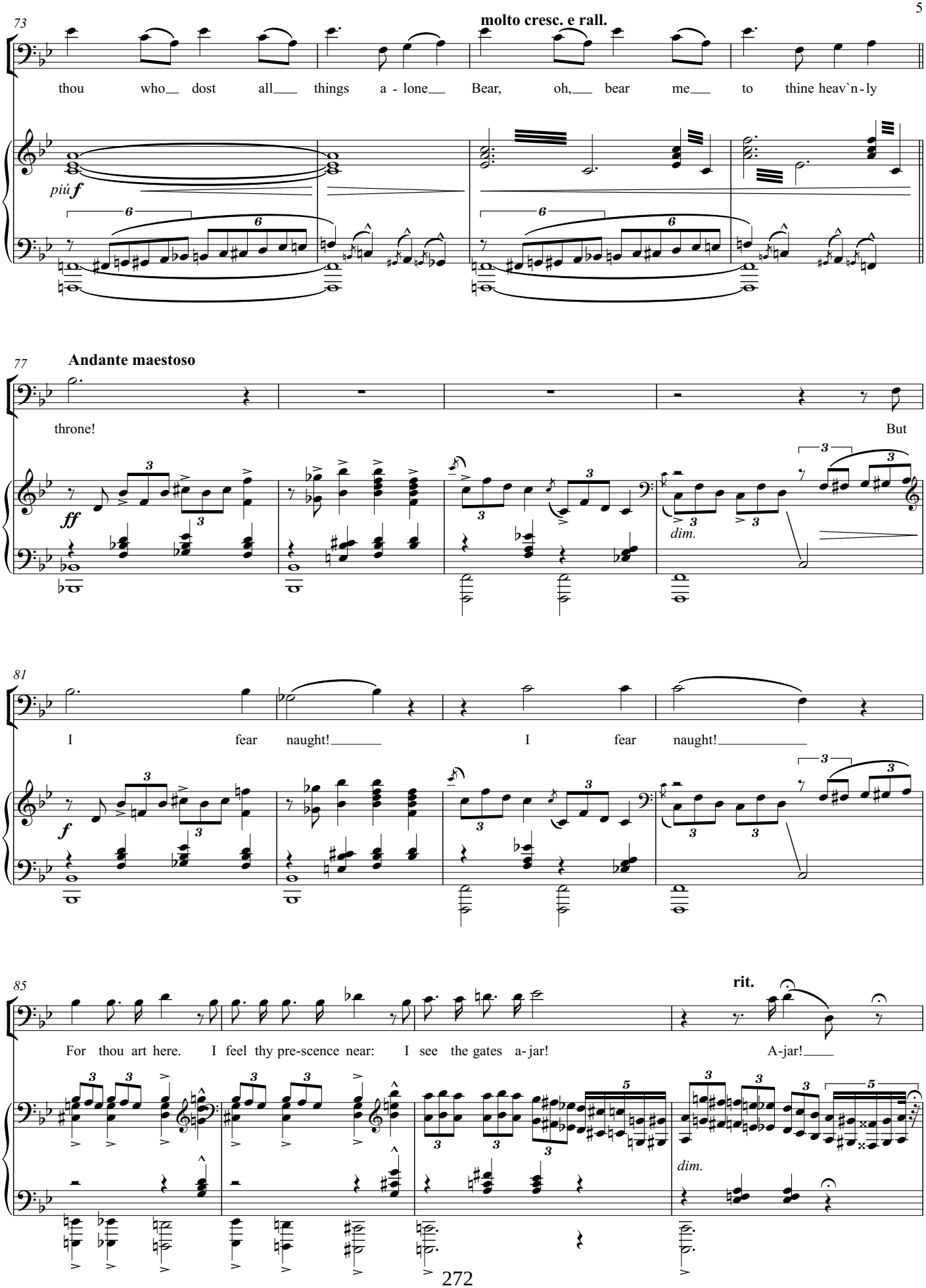
mp

65

see hov' ring oe'r me That fate - ful wing, That of death and de-struc - tion a - lone doth sing. O

69

do thou Je - ho - vah, Al - might - y King, whose won-drous songs of praise I sing; O


73
molto cresc. e rall.
thou who dost all things a - lone Bear, oh, bear me to thine heav`n - ly
piú f
77
Andante maestoso
throne!
But
ff
dim.
81
I fear naught!
I fear naught!
f
85
rit.
For thou art here. I feel thy pre-scence near: I see the gates a-jar!
A-jar!
dim.

89

O Ho - ly Ci - ty! Ho - ly Ci - - ty!

93

Soon shall I be at rest in thee! Praise to Je-ho - vah! Je-ho - -

cresc. *slargando*

97 **14** **a tempo** **rit.**

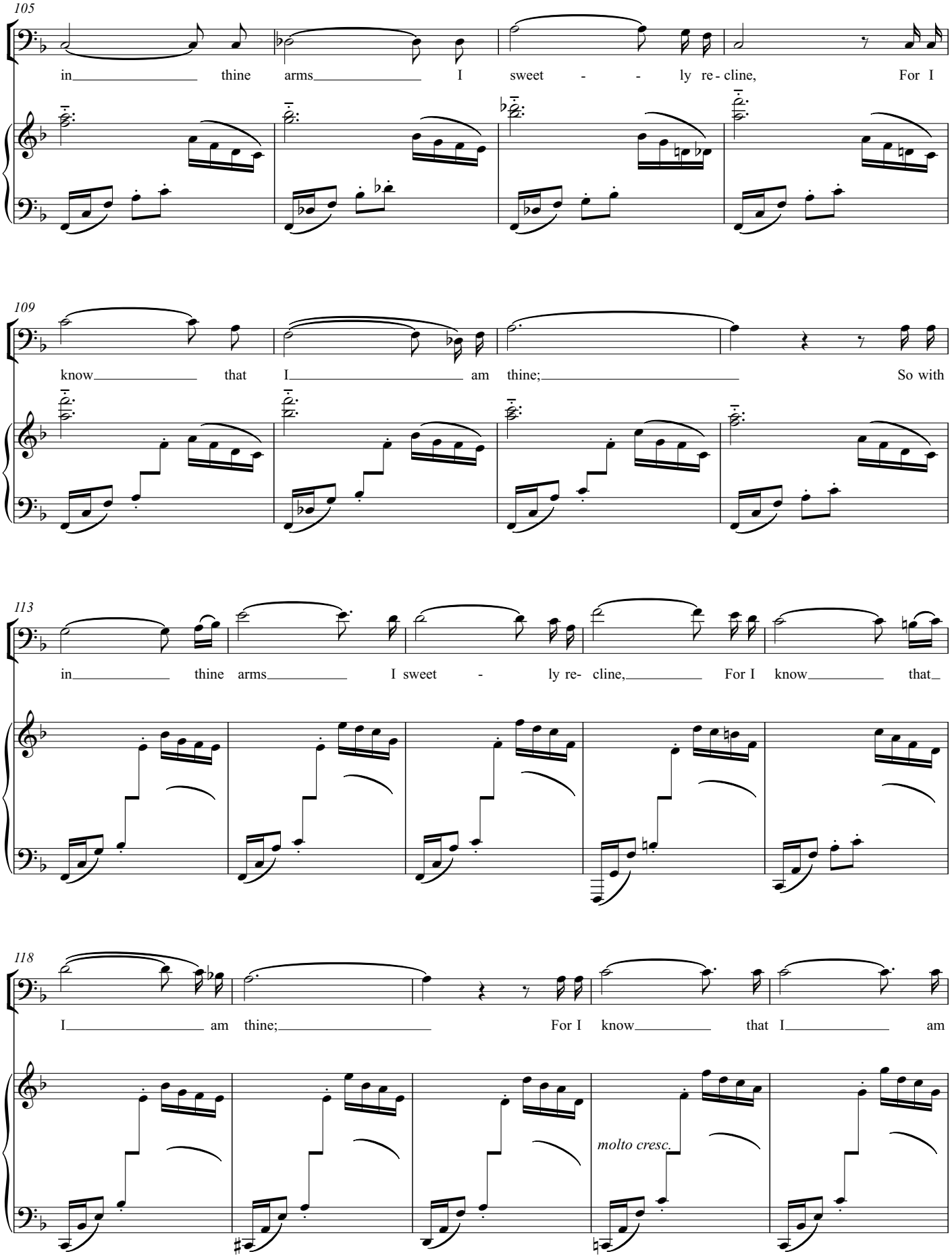
vah!

ff

101 **Andante grazioso** **Tranquillamente**

mp

So with-


105
in thine arms I sweet - - ly re - cline, For I
109
know that I am thine; So with
113
in thine arms I sweet - ly re- cline, For I know that
118
I am thine; For I know that I am
molto cresc.

123

Più animato

thine! Oh, I

WAILERS

Hear him, O I - - - sis, Hear

f

128

fear not! Oh,

him! Oh, hear him!

cresc. poco a poco

(PLATONUS retires, while the WAILERS bow down to the earth.)

133

I fear not!

Oh, hear him!

sfz

CONCLUSION

So fleet the works of men, back to the earth again
Ancient and holy things fade like a dream.[1]

Of all the decorative elements in the Tabor Grand Opera House, these lines by Charles Kingsley (1819–1875) on the theater's olio curtain have begot more nostalgia and fanciful curiosity than any other. Painted by Robert Hopkin in 1881, the curtain revealed a scene that was not unfamiliar to scenic artists of the time: ruined classical columns covered in ivy and overgrowth, in the foreground fallen tree branches lying about a reflecting pool submersing a rotting gondola, and a promenader-less colonnade that recedes into a mountain vista in distance. A once-great civilization as it returns to nature. Simultaneously, the scene evoked grandeur and desolation, success and failure, boom and bust. In histories of the opera house, the scene has been called "prophetic," relating this image and its attendant parable to the fate of Tabor, his fortune, and the opera house. Yet its prescience goes beyond mere foresight, and divulges intersections between culture and the building of the urban frontier, and broader implications for the present study (see Figure 31).

Kingsley, a University of Cambridge professor and canon of Westminster Abbey, visited Colorado during his 1874 tour of America, where he penned and preached in Colorado Springs

[1] From Charles Kingsley, "Old and New—A Parable," *Politics for the People* no. 2 (13 May 1848): 30. This patently quotable verse appeared many places; for example, painted on the walls of "the old church wall in San Diego," as remembered in popular magazine articles such as "An Old Story in Crumbling Walls," *Sunset* 4, no. 6 (1900), 244; and in the expository title cards preceding the opening shots of a ruined medieval castle in Douglas Fairbanks's 1922 silent film *Robin Hood*.

and Denver some of his final sermons on culture and the ethical citizen.[2] His views were already well-known from the 1855 publication of his historical novel *Westward Ho!*, which glorified expansionism and a belief in national greatness. Although written for a British audience, American readers reveled in their self-identification with the fierce independence of Kingsley's explorers and frontiersmen, in the triumphs and "shouts of joy" of imperialism bringing "free commerce and the colonization over the whole earth."[3] The novel lent its title to pioneer appeals and stagecoach companies, and a mural by Emanuel Leutze installed in the United States Capitol Building in 1861—properly known as *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*—is still referred to colloquially by tour guides as *Westward Ho!*, a paean to American exceptionalism and a celebration of the realization of Manifest Destiny.[4]

Kingsley's time in Colorado worked its way into the mythology of the state. In most histories of the Tabor Grand Opera House, a tale is repeated about a meeting between Kingsley and a young postmaster from Buckskin Joe, a placer mining camp a day's ride from Denver, who had journeyed to hear the minister speak. They conversed at length about politics, literature, art, and of great cities and buildings. On that occasion, Horace Tabor departed Kingsley's company with a gift, a book of verse recently received from London, which included the poem "Old and

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[2] Details of Kingsley's preaching tour of the American West were given in letters by his daughter, Mary St. Leger Kingsley, a novelist known by the nom de plume Lucas Malet; *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of His Life,* ed. Frances Eliza Grenfell Kingsley, abridged from the London edition (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1885), 467–472. See also Jan M.I. Klaver, "The Great Young Free New World," chap. 25 in *The Apostle of the Flesh: A Critical Life of Charles Kingsley*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History (Boston: Brill, 2006), 626–659.

[3] Charles Kingsley, *Westward Ho! Or The Voyages and Adventures of Sir Amyas Leigh, Knight of Burrough, in the County of Devon, in the reign of Her Most Glorious Majesty, Queen Elizabeth* (1855; reprinted New York: Airmont, 1969), 524; on the racial and cultural composition of the nation-empire as represented in Kingsley's works, see C.J. Wan-ling Wee, *Culture, Empire, and the Question of Being Modern* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2003).

[4] The original title of Leutze also takes its inspiration from a verse by the Irish poet George Berkeley; two titles for the same piece, both of which are imagined by British imperialist advocates. It is also worth noting that, in the study hanging in the Smithsonian, there is a figure in the center with his back turned toward the viewer, and he is carrying a water jug and bedroll; in the final work in the Capitol, these practical, everyday items have been replaced by a violin/fiddle carefully wrapped and slung over his shoulder.

New." Years later, when Robert Hopkin asked Tabor what he wished for in the Tabor Grand's act curtain, he was presented with this verse, which he rendered into the Babylonic scene. A charming anecdote, evocative of the folklore of the place, and the aspirations of its boosters who were determined to build Denver as a great outpost of civilization. A 1927 *Boston Globe* article, "Tabor Had Luck—But Some of It Was Bad," made Kingsley's verse the centerpiece of a full-page special on Tabor's rags-to-riches-and-back-again story, and as recently as 1984, the *Rocky Mountain News* regaled readers about the beauty of the theater and its prophetic epitaph. The lines also appear at the end of Douglas Moore's opera *The Ballad of Baby Doe* (1956), sung motet-like by a chorus of phantoms delivering a prudent lesson.[5]

Figure 31 Photograph by Joseph Collier of the olio curtain of the Tabor Grand Opera House by Robert Hopkin, 1881. (History Colorado, Hart Research Center, 89.451.2244.)

[5] Boston Globe, 13 March 1927, C2; *RMN*, 29 January 1984, 24; On a reading of these lines in Moore's opera, see Duane A. Smith, "So Fleet the Works of Man: *The Ballad of Baby Doe* and Mining," *Mining History Journal* (1998): 53–62, and Kirk, *American Opera*, 282–283.

A fantastic story. One that is blighted, however, by the fact that as early as 1869, more than five years before Kingsley arrived in Colorado, Hopkin had decorated the act curtain of the first Detroit Opera House with almost exactly the same scene, inscribing it with the same lines.[6] Furthermore, perhaps in fulfilling its prophecy, when the Tabor Grand Opera House was converted into a movie theater in 1921, the act curtain was removed to Central City, where it was placed into storage and forgotten about. In the 1960s, it was discovered, mildewed and mouse-eaten, and burned at the city dump.[7] For forty years, Denverites had looked upon this once-magnificent curtain as a defining characteristic of their opera house, sharing stories about its origins, and the glory that the opera house and its performances had bestowed on the city during its first boom. In no way are these actualities of the origins and density of the Tabor Grand's olio curtain intended to diminish the special quality of Denver's nostalgia for a once great structure. On the contrary, they are a significant part of precisely why the theater, the professional and amateur artists who walked its boards, and its genteel and largely middle-class audience have remained points of fascination for scholars, local history buffs, and enthusiasts.

Yet the realities of the curtain's scene also bespeak a connection between culture, changing tastes, and political and financial tides in Denver on the ebb. The Bland-Allison Act of 1878 and the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 had jointly required the federal government to purchase upwards of six million ounces of silver every month with paper currency. Colorado's

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[6] Richard M. Tutor, "The History of The Detroit Opera House, 1869–1897 (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1972), 64–65, 243–244; William E. Hezlep, "A History of The Detroit Opera House, 1898–1931 (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1973), 101–103. Hopkin's Detroit curtain and the original opera house at Campus Martius were destroyed in a fire in 1897. The Detroit Historical Museum (now the Detroit Historical Society) featured Hopkin's works in a 1955 exhibit titled, "An Artist Views Detroit—Robert Hopkin," which included a study for the Detroit and by extension Denver act curtains. The study remain the property of the Society, and a photograph of the piece on display during the exhibit is viewable at Robert Hopkin Collection, Detroit Historical Society, 2013.048.571, https://detroithistorical.pastperfectonline.com/photo/56F16CB9-EDEF-463F-95BF-223490446356.

[7] The fate of the curtain was relayed by Frank Gates, a long-time carpenter at Central City Opera, and was printed in *RMN*, 29 January 1984, 26; also quoted in Jennings, "Grand Opera Comes to Denver," 84n82.

silver mining industry expanded, enabling farmers, miners, and merchants to pay debts and make new investments. But European and eastern bankers were uneasy about the atypical silver standard, and all indications pointed toward imminent economic distress. Mines and smelters in the mountains were shuttered with little notice as prospectors pulled their investments out of the state, forcing unemployed workers into Denver where there were also no jobs. During July 1893, twelve Denver banks closed in the span of two weeks, and the *Rocky Mountain News* plastered its front pages with rallying cries: "Shoulder to Shoulder, men, while the war upon Colorado continues." Silverites labored to prevent the repeal of the act, but to no avail. Initial labor statistics from September 1, revealed that across the state the financial crisis had instigated four hundred business failures, half of the producing mines had closed, and over forty-five thousand people were out of work. Most could not sustain themselves without the silver market. Denver's population dropped from more than one hundred thousand in 1890 to ninety thousand in 1895, the only period of population decline in the city's history. Some remained hopeful that free coinage would save the city's wealth, but before long, a new economy founded on an industry other than a government-supported market from the silver mines had to be built.[8]

Life and leisure became leaner in Denver following the panic, and opera had a difficult time regaining its place of primacy before the Italian priest Joseph Bosetti immigrated in 1915 and established the Denver Grand Opera Company. In the interim, the Tabor Grand Opera House and Broadway Theater had to produce more types of amusements at reduced costs to stay afloat, and other venues and summer pleasure gardens all but ceased offering staged musical-theatrical entertainments. A new organization, formed by Peter McCourt as the Tabor Amusement

[8] Carl Ubbelohde, Maxine Benson, and Duane A. Smith, eds., *A Colorado History*, 10th ed. (Portland, OR: West Winds, 2006), 218–234; Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 102–111.

Company (though neither Tabor nor Baby Doe played any role in the organization), hosted primarily vaudeville and comic plays. An occasional operetta was typically the result of amateur efforts, and the size of the few touring companies still actively coming to the American West and their repertories continued to shrink.[9] For that matter, an article in the *Republican* queried if opera was still possible, whether this "most expensive kind of entertainment" was viable in the new economy, especially larger continental works: "The question as to whether grand opera, together with all the necessary detail, can ever be made to pay in this country is, so far, a problem to be solved."[10] Certainly opera never disappeared from the cultural life of the city, especially works in English that advanced middle-class values, but its dominance was ephemeral.

Beginning with the arrival of the Gruenwalds at the time of the Sand Creek Massacre, boosters engaged opera to civilize the city and affirm, if not justify, the colonial mission of expansionism. As suitable theaters for hosting fully staged operas were instituted, their promotional value was leveraged in urbanizing the frontier, and hailed for their role in transforming Denver from a periphery outpost into an imperial center. Audience's knowledge and tastes also grew. City leaders and newspapers petitioned opera troupes, soliciting star performers to offer certain works for a benefit. Committees were formed to protect cultural interests, and to identify a patron who could fund their passions. The patronage, design, and siting of Horace Tabor's Grand Opera House was vital not only to Denver's operatic culture, but also to improving perceptions of the city from without—in fact, its decorative links to other cities and opera houses invite a closer study of the interconnectedness of these institutions. Most

[9] An incomplete list of professional itinerant professional troupes to visit Denver during the economic depression includes the Conried-Ferenczy Comic Opera Company (1894), Carleton Opera Company (1895), the Marie Tavary English Opera Company (1895), and the Bostonians and Kimball Opera Company (1895 and 1896). Walter Damrosch and his German Opera Company visited in early 1896, offering a week of Wagner operas at the Broadway Theater. See Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 226–228.

[10] *Denver Republican*, 6 May 1894, 4; quoted in Miles, *Orpheus in the Wilderness*, 225.

importantly, the Tabor Grand was constructed with a foundation of political ideology. It was a house built for the many and not the few. Denver audiences cheered English-language opera companies and their accessible prices; at the same time, they were keenly aware of vernacular opera's populist value, openly opposing theater managers and foreign-language troupes who dared to exclude the middle class. In turn, middle and working-class amateur musicians in both white and black communities claimed opera production as their own social activity, crafting communitarianism, civic duty, and their identity and very presence in the American West on the unexpected canvas of opera.

As opera production is inextricably linked to social and spatial contexts, this dissertation has demonstrated that it also asserted collective cultural identity at a local and often obscured level. Opera was a barometer of Denver's affluence and success in becoming *the* metropolis of the urban frontier, although its staying power was tested. At each turn in the fortunes of the city, from its incorporation, through its boom years, and into its first major economic depression, opera production and reception were part of a civilizing mission traced in its audience's pursuit of culture and respectability. Denverites frequented the opera not only as leisurely diversion, but also in an effort to create an image of a city that was attractive and admirable, to advocate for the city and its propriety inside and out. Operatic culture offered opportunities for fashioning and refashioning identity in a place where people, goods, and experiences circulated widely and changed regularly. After all, next to clothing, it is one's taste in diversions that is most easily altered, or at least portrayed differently for social benefits. Through cultural exchange, opera entered Denver's entertainment market not as the reserve of the elite, but as a consumer commodity accessible to middle-class citizens, all of whom were immigrants and settlers of the American West in one way or another. By recognizing a history of opera in Denver that, as

David Gramit has suggested, emerged from the transnational perspective of displacements, booms and busts, and cultural imperatives of colonialism, it is my hope that this study has provided a small vista into understanding further intersections between local histories—commonly the purview of amateurs (*lover of*)—and the naturalization of opera in the urban frontier of America.[11]

[11] David Gramit, "The Transnational History of Settler Colonialism and the Music of the Urban West: Resituating a Local Music History," *American Music* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 272–291.

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